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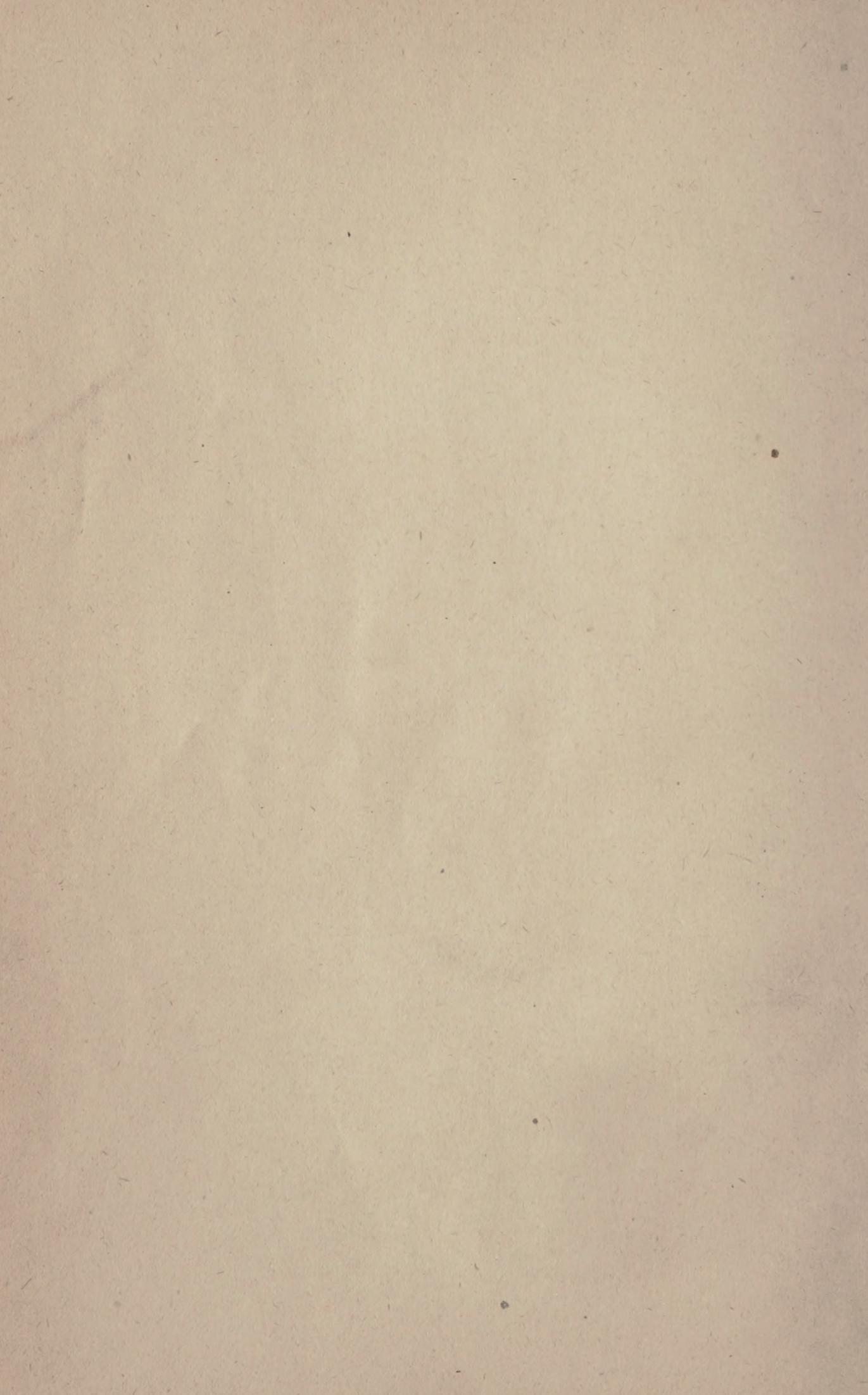
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UNITED STATES OF AMERICA.





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A

MODERN SAINT CHRISTOPHER;

OR,

THE BROTHERS.

By ROSE PORTER.

35



NEW YORK:

ANSON D. F. RANDOLPH & COMPANY,

38 WEST TWENTY-THIRD STREET.

1937

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PREFATORY.

THE law of the lower realm, that "Nature never repeats herself," reaches up and on to the higher kingdom of character, where every individual soul possesses the light or darkness of its own special selfhood. And yet a soul may suggest another with an intensity of likeness so real that it bridges continents and centuries, asserting a claim of brother or sisterhood with one who lived and loved, suffered and rejoiced, in ages so long gone by that their story can only be read as we turn the pages of illumined missive, or trace the moss and lichen grown inscriptions on crumbling stones in ancient burial-grounds.

Very vividly, I realized this truth, as the thought came to me of passing on for your perusal the history of Nathan Parret, for with it came to my memory the old-time legend of St. Christopher, which, though all unlike in detail and circumstance, strikingly foreshadows in its spiritual development Nathan's experiences. As it holds the key-note of my tale I will briefly recount it, for perchance without, you might miss the harmony that underlies Nathan's story, as surely as struggle underlies victory. This truth you will need to remember in the reading of his life, with its onward and upward course, so often seemingly rudely broken and interrupted ; which is no cause for regret, since trial is the test of all noble souls, and discipline the law of human progress. A

fitting maxim that for this legend of St. Christopher, which leads, as we seek his birth-place, to the far-away land of Canaan, and of Judea among the hills.

Offero—"the Bearer"—we have no record explaining why this emblem name was given him, for all we know of his childhood and youth is summed up in the story of his rare strength, which made him a king physically among his people. Nevertheless, poverty compelled him to seek the lowly office of a servant, though he determined to call none Master save the most powerful Monarch. After long search he came at last to the court of a Ruler said to excel all others in strength, and to him he straightway offered allegiance, which was gladly accepted.

At that time Offero had not heard of the "kingdom of will," right and wrong, in which either Christ or Satan must hold sway, and in his ignorance he supposed, as his Master was the chief of Monarchs, he must be destitute of all fear. Hence great was his surprise to find this man of strength trembling with dread as he listened to the song of a wandering minstrel, who more than once repeated the name of Satan.

Offero noted, too, that at that name the Ruler bowed his head and made the sign of the cross, as though to ward off impending danger. In reply to his query as to "Why this was?" the Ruler answered, "I make this sign that Satan may have no power over me, for he is very mighty, and I fear lest he shall overcome me."

From these words Offero knew there was one stronger than the Ruler he served, and he said: "O Ruler, since there is one whom thou fearest, him will

I seek, for my Master must fear no one.” And again he started forth in search of the One stronger than any other.

After many days he came to the border of a wide, desolate plain, across which, advancing as though to meet him, approached a mighty and terrible form, marching at the head of an armed legion. This terrible being paid no heed to Offero’s great size and strength, but with an air of authority demanded, “Whither goest thou, and whom dost thou seek?”

Then said Offero, “I seek the King Satan, for I have heard he is the most powerful of all Rulers, and I would have him, this One of greatest strength, for master.” And Satan, well pleased, answered, “I am he whom you seek, and henceforth your service shall be easy and pleasant.” And Offero, bowing before him in token of submission, was numbered among Satan’s followers.

Not long after, as they journeyed, they came to a cross erected by the wayside, which, when Satan saw, he turned in haste and fled, trembling with fear as the Ruler had done. Then said Offero, “What is this cross, and wherefore dost thou, like my first Master, tremble and fear before it? Except thou tellest me I must leave thee.”

Being thus compelled to answer, the evil one replied: “I fear the cross, because upon it Jesus died; and when I behold it I fly, lest He should overcome me.” So a second time Offero found he had been deceived, and that there was One still mightier and stronger than either of the Monarchs he had served. And he left Satan, and wandered for many days seeking this Christ—the One above all others.

At length he came to a humble hermit, whom he entreated to tell him where the Christ could be found. The hermit, seeing that Offero knew nothing of Jesus, began to teach him, saying : "Thou art right in believing that Christ is the greatest of all Kings, for His power is over both heaven and earth, and will last throughout eternity ; but thou canst not serve Him lightly. He will impose great duties if He accept thy service, and thou must fast and pray." "But fast I cannot," said Offero, "for it is my strength that makes me a good servant, and I know not how to pray."

"Go seek the Christ," the hermit said, "and He will teach thee. And if first thou wilt use thy strength as a test of thy willingness to serve, go to the deep, wide river that is often swollen with the rains, and sweeps away in its swift current many of those who would cross it, and aid those who struggle with its waves; and the weak and the little ones, bear thou on thy shoulders from shore to shore. This is a good work, and if the Christ will have thee for His service, He will assure thee of His acceptance and teach thee how to pray."

On hearing this Offero was glad, and hastening to the river, he built upon its banks a hut of boughs, and then he began his work and not one perished, where formerly so many had been swept away. When asked why he rendered this service of helping the weak, always he replied, "I am Christ's servant ; this is the work He bids me do." For a staff Offero used a palm-tree, which he pulled up in the forest, and it was not too large for his great height and strength.

As Jesus beheld this and heard Offero's words, He was well pleased ; for though Offera had not yet learned to pray, he had found a way to serve.

At length there came a night when the storm was wilder than ever before, and seeking refuge from its fury, Offero found shelter within his hut of boughs ; as he entered it, louder than the roar of the wind and dashing of the waves, he heard the voice of a feeble child calling, "Offero, wilt thou carry me over?" Yet though he went out quickly, no child could he find. But no sooner did he re-enter the hut than he heard the same voice calling, "Offero, Offero, help me over the river!"

Again he went forth, this time taking a lantern that cast a bright light athwart his path, and not far had he gone when he saw the child, alone, out in the storm. Eagerly the little one besought : "Carry me over to-night!" And Offero, consenting, lifted the child in his strong arms, and placed him on his shoulders, and began to cross the foam-crested waves of the river. And as he crossed, louder blew the wind, darker grew the night, more wildly tossed the waves, while the roar of the swift-flowing waters was as the sound of many thunders.

Meanwhile, the little child that had seemed at first to the strong Offero a light weight to carry, grew heavier and heavier, until he feared he would sink beneath the burden. "Jesus, whom I serve, help me," he cried. And he did not know that cry was a prayer. And then, leaning hard, clinging close to the staff, at last he reached the other shore, and put his burden safely down on the green grass of the bank, while again he cried, "Whom

have I borne? had it been the whole world it could not have been more heavy."

Then the child replied: "Me thou hast desired to serve, and I have accepted thee. Lo! thou hast borne not only the whole world, but Him who made it, on thy shoulders; for in thine hour of weakness thou sought strength of the One of All Strength." And Offero knew the Christ, and fell down and worshipped Him; thus he had learned not only to serve, but also to pray.

The legend does not end here; other trials of his faithfulness still awaited Offero before he was "called to be a saint." But always he met them holding firm in his clasp the staff the Christ had blessed; and when tried by persecution or temptation, he ever made answer, "Through Christ I will conquer, for when my strength is weakness, He will help me. And He let me bear Him on my shoulders, saying, 'Henceforth, inasmuch as ye do it unto one of the least of my brethren, ye do it unto me.' And my name Offero, 'the Bearer,' He changed to 'Christ-offerer.'"

Do you wonder that in the sunny lands of the South, where legends and wayside songs are inwrought into belief as our creeds are interwoven with our faith, this tale of St. Christopher has come to fill a place real and life-like? And that even the sight of his picture suffuses new strength into the hearts of the weak and weary, as they softly whisper, "He was Offero, but now he is St. Christopher; for in the hour when his strength failed he sought help from the One of All Strength."

PART I.

If the deed is precious for the sake of the thought of which it is the fruit, the thought must vindicate its power by the corresponding deed.

Man, as he is, is not fully revealed till thought is embodied in deed. And when Descartes had said, “*I think, therefore I am,*” I cannot but rejoice that Whichcote silently corrected the famous sentence by the more memorable phrase, “*I act, therefore I am.*”—WESTCOTT.

I.

THERE is nothing that so speedily suggests mystery as contradiction, whether it be manifested by action, speech, or the mute sign of opposing principles in merely material work. This is especially noticeable in architecture, where markedly conflicting styles will straightway rivet attention, and awaken interest in what otherwise would be nothing more than an ordinary building. And seldom is this statement more strongly verified than in the case of the old Parret House, around which for years there has centred a never-waning curiosity, not only on the part of new-comers, but also among the old residents of the somewhat prosaic village of N——. A village that is a fac-simile of hundreds of villages that are scattered thick as daisies in the grass from New England's remotest inland boundary to the farthest out-reaching seaport town that studs its coast; from Maine's rock-bound shore on to the sheltered harbors of Massachusetts and Connecticut. And this wide-spreading area covers acres and acres, diversified by mountains, lesser hills, valleys, and open meadow-lands, dense

forests and low-lying plains, interspersed by rushing rivers and lakes, some wide and wave-tossed as miniature seas, others calm as the still waters of King David's psalm.

But all this has not to do with Parret House, and the impression one received from even a passing glance at the dull red of its brick walls, the monotony of which were broken by a goodly array of narrow window-casements, set with the tiny glass panes of a bygone time. "Window lights" those bits of glass were called by the country-folk, for the early settlers of New England had a way of poetic nomenclature, while, at the same time, they so steadfastly banished fancy and romance from any recognized place either in their hearts or minds.

Adding to the quaint effect of the many windows were the close, gloomy-looking shutters that guarded them, and which were made of solid, undivided lengths of wood, like box-lids, and painted a green that was no more like the green of nature than the coloring of a gray-coated sparrow is like the brilliant hues of the oriole or blue-bird.

As for the door that led into the northern side of the house, it was one of those inhospitable doors that opened wide its upper half, as though to court conversation, while the lower half, through which entrance was attainable, remained close-barred.

And yet, spite these sombre details, there was something of picturesqueness about that north-side view. For the slope of the roof, as it extended over the western wing, was a long slant, broken by dormer windows, and the upward-pointing shaft of a high chimney, from which smoke began to float skyward by dawn of spring and mid-summer days, and a full hour before sunrise during the autumn and winter months. And no home whose chimney thus sends upward the curling haze of its fireside smoke, can be utterly destitute of cheer.

Then, too,—and here it is that curiosity begins to waken,—one caught a glimpse of castellated turrets towering up beyond that western wing, and the sight of them was like a sudden annulling of space, and the transferring of some hillside chateau from the land of sunny France into the very heart of bleak New England,—an impression which deepened into a sense of reality by merely passing from the northwestern corner of the house to its southern side, for there, instead of beholding the home of a well-to-do New England Squire, one stood before the vine-wreathed porch of a veritable *maisonnette*, yet sufficiently imposing in size and ornamentation to merit the title of M. le Comte's chateau. This effect of reality was enhanced by the flower-bordered walk that led from the garden gate up to the very

steps of the porch, for those borders were ablaze with gaily-tinted blossoms from May on to November.

There was a grassy field, too, beyond the gate, where, when the sky was clear, sunshine played in changing, golden light through the hours of the livelong day. In this field, when the year's season was springtime, it was hard to tell which held sway —grass-blades, violets, buttercups, or anemones—for they all grew in a profusion bountiful as the blossoming of their foreign cousins, the far-famed double-leaved violets, narcissus, iris white and blue, and roses pink and yellow.

Hence, as I said, though lacking in the brilliancy of color possessed by the French-born flowerets, they nevertheless made that field seem like a bit of France, even though one did miss the song of the nightingale, "most musical, most sweet," with its liquid note that always seems calling for the answering of love. Yes, the melody of the nightingale's love-language, as it flits from bough to bough among the orange and almond-trees of southern France, is something we New England dwellers must always miss, though we do have song and song-birds.

But, save in an undefined way, one did not much think of the birds, as they noted how nature had

helped man in conforming that scene to its foreign prototype. For edging the grassy field was a *bosquet*, through which a winding path led to the bank of a swift-running brooklet, whose waters, as they rippled over the pebbly bed, held a perpetual hint of music. On the bank-sides of the stream grew a wild tangle of alders; marsh willows; and dwarf pines, the deep green of their spear-like foliage half-hidden by the clinging tendrils of bitter-sweet, or the more delicate leafage of wild ivy and woodbine. Higher up on the banks, and overtopping the lesser growths, were oak, chestnut, maple, and hemlock, and—not classifying these trees, but merely looking at the interblending of the various shades of green that clothe their boughs in summer, some in dark and sombre, others in light and yellow hues—it was easy to let imagination picture the tinting of olive, magnolia, orange, and almond.

It was easy, also, to wonder if the distant tinkling of a cow-bell heralded the approach of some brown-eyed shepherd or shepherdess, whose shrill voice might at any moment break the reigning quietness by a sharp call to dog, or scattered flock of sheep or goats; or perchance by the sweeter note of even or matin-song, the echoing “Ave, Ave Maria,” that over-and-over repeated canticle so dear to the shepherd youths and maidens of sunny France.

After all this descriptive loitering, you will plainly see why the impression one received of Parret House greatly depended on whether you approached it by the way of the northern or southern entrance.

The two paths of approach were marked by an unlikeness quite as striking, the high-road that led past the north gate being well kept and much travelled. In Colonial days it was the most direct route from the now sturdy capital city, to the rock-guarded collegiate town, that so early in our country's history, set the royal seal of learning, as a pledge of "high thinking and plain living," on that well-nigh least State—according to the measure of miles—that claims a star in the flag of our Union. That you may locate Parret House with something of definiteness, I will tell you that it is midway between the two cities to which I have referred. As for the southern, and less-frequented way of approaching the mansion, it was a mere by-road for wood-cutters and charcoal-burners, with their heavily-laden teams—loads that cut deep ruts in the yielding soil, where water-pools lingered long after every equinoctial storm or down-pouring mid-summer shower. And though the width of those ruts was no more than a space spanned by a couple of inches, they caught deep, far-reaching reflections of

overhanging tree-boughs, and glints of blue sky, broken by the swiftly-passing fleecy cloudlets, that looked like the waving of angels' wings, mirrored there in the roadside pools.

Ferns and brakes, too, grow high in the deep, mossy glades that edge the way ; and long after the spring blossoms of the hillside and open fields have faded, one may find timid flowerets still in full bloom in those sheltered nooks.

It is strange how flowers, that we are wont to call children of sunshine, love shady places like that ; following one another in the floral calendar from the spring days of opening arbutus buds, on to the last bloom of autumn's golden-rod and purple aster. A parable of life, verily ; at least so thought the youngest son of Parret House, Nathan, about whom the chief interest of our story centres.

This wood-road was the way by which he liked best to return home, whether the hour were mid-day or toward nightfall, when fireflies flitted in and out among the shadows, like smiles playing amid tears on the faces of little children. And this is Nathan's thought, also, for he always had a way of thinking a thought into whatever he saw.

But not so, did Victor Parret, the first-born son and heir to all the broad acres of that wide-spread farm, save for the narrow strip of meadow-lands

and the stretch of forest, which was Nathan's by right of inheritance. No; Victor was entirely free from any tendency to invest either man or nature with more than the most casual look revealed, and he was content to come and go by the well-kept high-road, for which he paid his yearly tax with never a murmur, so long as the swiftly-revolving wheels of his high-topped chaise encountered no obstructing jolt or rut.

Strange, that the matter of contradictory tastes between the brothers should be manifested in so slight a matter as their choice of a road; but so it was, and it serves as a type of them from babyhood on to manhood. But before I begin to unwind the tangled story of their contradictory and conflicting lives, I must pause to tell something of their parentage.

The father, French by birth, education, temperament, and taste; and the mother, whose mind, heart, and physique all proclaimed the Puritan ancestry which was her pride, and hence her danger. For pride always is dangerous, even though it be of so good a thing as birth, education, or religion —this we know from our Lord's own parable regarding the essence of pride; I mean the one that records the prayer of him who thanked God that he was “not as other men.”

II.

AS I said, if we are to follow the life-story of the Parret brothers, we must first learn something of the characters of their parents, and also of the influences that encompassed their early years. And so I turn the pages of a yellow, time-stained manuscript to find recorded the tale of Adolph Parret's coming to America, and his meeting with Squire Wolcott's fair daughter, gentle, sedate Prudence, who straightway won the heart of the impulsive Frenchman. The story of their courtship reads like a page from some old-time love poem, and it is all sweet, fresh, and pure as the song of a lark, or the blossom of a lily.

And if the language seems somewhat quaint and formal, it was after the manner of the times. Then, too, Adolph Parret was a thorough Frenchman in his power of illumining with rosy coloring all that deeply stirred his heart; thus, every line of that old journal is aglow with admiration for what he termed "the child-simple soul" of his love. "She is true, pure, and tender as a white dove,"—thus he writes; and he pictures "the calm depth of her dark eyes," and her smile, which he

calls “half-holy,” while in her voice there was no hint of the high-pitched tone that sounded like a discordant note in the speech of most of the New England women he met.

This is the description of Prudence, as I gather it from those manuscript pages. Does it give, I wonder, any true idea of Prudence Wolcott? Certainly it suggests a maiden possessed of qualities ready to open into a lovely womanhood. And, in many respects, that was her development, but there were shadows in it, amounting almost—I am forced to use the words—to grave inconsistencies; for noble, true impulses more than once were vanquished by ignoble in their contest, not with great trials, but by the petty daily annoyances of life. Every woman knows what these are, for they are neither limited by countries or centuries, wealth or poverty; and seek though we may for the victorious weapon with which to conquer this armed host, none have ever yet found any sure way, save that of strength of will sufficient to yield, first, one’s own will to God’s; and then to yield it to others, in the details of life which involve, not yielding of principles, but of prejudices; not of truths, but of opinions.

Prudence Wolcott’s marriage with Adolph Parret, from the very beginning held grave danger; for by education and creed their views were as un-

like as their birth-lands were unlike in climate and national traits. But those were the days when, in New England, the halo of the courtly, brave champion of their country, the much-loved Marquis de Lafayette, still encircled every Frenchman, and with special radiance centred around a high-born refugee like the young M. le Comte Parret; who came seeking shelter from the woes of war then devastating his own land, and banishing its nobles by the score. Thus it happened that he speedily won the favor of Squire Wolcott, to whom he brought a letter of introduction from no less a person than the famous Lafayette himself. So, after reading it, the Squire welcomed the young foreigner with warmth, and opened wide his hospitable home and heart as a safe retreat for this stranger from beyond the sea. Yet spite this cordiality of reception, I have never heard satisfactorily explained Squire Wolcott's yielding to his daughter's marriage with any but one of his own creed, and a son of his native soil.

But one thing is certain—when consent was granted, it was in no half-way measure; for the Squire blessed the marriage not only with a smile of hearty good-will and words of sound counsel, but also with a substantial gift, for he gave an out-and-out deed conveying his north-meadow farm, and the homestead thereon, to his daughter Prudence.

As for M. le Comte's own wealth, it seemed boundless to the frugal folk among whom he sought a new home; and when he died, eight years after the birth of the youngest son, Nathan, he left a sum sufficient to rank the Parret brothers wealthier than any of their neighbors in all that region of country. And added to this, only a brief twelve-month afterward they fell heir to their mother's goodly inheritance, which had increased twofold on the death of her father, the Squire. Thus, before either lad had crossed the threshold of their teens, they were assured of the position wealth secures. As to whether they would maintain it by worth of character, that remains to be proved; but I will not anticipate.

From the time Adolph Parret decided to settle in N——, he had used his riches with a liberal hand, and it was no wonder his home was known by the title of Parret House for miles and miles around. It had been his pleasure, too, to transform the southern part of the old homestead into, as near as possible, a likeness to the chateau in southern France where his early days had been spent. But with strange persistence, Prudence, while loving at heart, was resolute in her determination that no foreign element should invade the northern part, or what she termed the front, of the house. Thus

she stamped a look of contradiction on the merely exterior part of her home, which in the interior was still more evident.

And now a word as to Adolph Parret, those days. I find no journal extract from which to cull it, but there is a portrait hanging over the mantel in the north parlor, which is said to be a striking likeness of his outer man, and which is rarely full of hints of the inner. So marked is the charm of that pictured face, one immediately understands the out-going love of Prudence for the young stranger, even though to a close student there is much in it which tells of one lacking in traits that would make him a life-lasting hero.

It represents a refined, aristocratic man, in age somewhere between twenty-five and thirty; the upper part of the face decidedly handsome; the eyes dark, and with a look of power in them; the brow high and broad, and the head well poised. All this gives a certain effect of fineness and finish, though the lower part of the countenance is not so well developed, there being an undefined weakness about it—the lips thin; and the chin somewhat receding. Nevertheless, as I said, only one possessed of quick intuition, or a well-trained eye, would detect these contradictory elements, which suggest a duality of nature that makes a keen ob-

server turn from the portrait with a feeling of disappointment, if not actual distrust.

And yet, in justice, one is forced to ask: "Did those subtle lines about the mouth reveal more than the stamp of nationality?"—or were they traced there by the influence of the early training, which in France and Italy, at that time, taught a child first tact and self control, and then, as though of secondary importance, frankness and truth—thus early implanting a certain insincerity and worldly wisdom contrary to the principle that Truth, in word, thought, and deed, is the only sure foundation on which to build up character? It was not till after the birth of their first child that Prudence recognized this lack of entire genuineness in her husband; but when once her eyes were opened to it, they were never shut again.

But it is not the story of the parents, but of the sons, I am to tell, and already I have hinted enough to give an impression of the influences that would be apt to surround young children whose father and mother viewed life from stand-points so widely different; and yet they were both fine types of their own nationality, religion, and culture, hence both had power to exert an abiding and formative influence over their sons, even though the lads were so young when they were left orphans.

III.

“CHARACTER is not ready-made, but created, bit by bit, and day by day.” The truth of this statement we all know, and yet no one has ever yet been able to explain the subtle process by which memory gathers her harvest of life-lasting recollections; holding some of but trifling importance in a firm clasp, and letting fall ungarnered others of priceless value. But thus it is that the law of the power of “little things” asserts itself in the history of our minds and souls; as it does in the mere matter of material existence.

The mother of the Parret brothers was a woman to heed this truth, and yet with her children, she trampled on its first manifestation, which has to do with a child’s receiving of impressions, while still too young to define them into definite forms. She fondly loved both the little lads, and she had a Puritan sense of justice which forbade the showing of partiality by word or deed; yet in her inmost heart she knew her affection centred with peculiar tenderness around the elder, Victor. And a child is so quick to read even mute signs, the boy Victor

knew this, too, and so did the baby-brother, Nathan, even before he had uttered his first spoken word.

Thus it happened that only a twelvemonth of earthly life taught him that his was a second place in his mother's heart, and his baby-soul cried out for an equal one. I do not think he ever craved to be first, certainly not with any desire born of rivalry; it was equality he claimed, with the strength of a strong nature, and this was manifested in other ways than those which had to do with his mother. Even in early childhood it was evident, in his plays, and later in school and college life, in the resolute purpose which made him unwilling to be left behind, whether the race were mental or athletic.

It was a trait to cause suffering, and yet it was a great safeguard to Nathan Parret, for it led him to follow as guide, or accept as master, only those who were leaders in their different pursuits. In home-life, too, it held control, and when a young child, instinctively, he seemed to know—in matters that had to do with mental knowledge and culture—it was from his father he must seek aid; while for the solving of the moral questions which even then perplexed the boy, he turned to his mother for counsel, and she did not fail to inculcate truth as the key-note of spiritual strength, neither did she fail to enforce the foundation-principles of the doctrines then holding

sway in New England ; and if some seeds did fall on stony ground, others took root and sprang up, for his mother's influence was always a power in Nathan's life. Indeed her only failure, so far as this boy went, was in her undue fondness for his brother; and that increased as the stream of dividing sympathies widened between herself and her husband, till she became almost blind in her love for Victor.

It is a singular fact that some women, morally strong in many other points, will thus weakly centre their affection on one object with an intensity so absorbing that, at last, it fails to distinguish the difference between *idealizing* and *idolizing*. And thus love, the most blessed and blessingful of all attributes, becomes perverted into the most harmful. For the affection which makes idols of our loved ones rivets chains about them, keeping them, in a certain way, slaves to our own level ; while the love which idealizes is like a voice urging the loved one to soar up and on, by aspiration and deed, far beyond our level, even to the life which is perfect freedom. You know the freedom I mean ; that held in the Bible verse, "I walk at liberty, because I keep Thy laws."

This is why, in the best love, the affection called forth is always for the *ideal* in advance of the actual,

for “the earnest expectation of the creature *waiteth* for the revealing of the sons of God”; but meanwhile, the mount we have to climb

“Is such, that
At the beginning down below it’s toilsome,
And aye the more one climbs the less it hurts.”

To return to Prudence and her absorbing love for Victor—certainly, it did clip the wings of the boy’s soul in a hundred ways that only the after-years revealed. And yet by strangers, from childhood on to manhood, he was apt to be thought more winning than Nathan; and so he was, in personal appearance and easy grace of manner and speech. For he inherited, in feature and figure, and mind too, many of the most attractive characteristics of his parents, that could not fail to please: even though one straightway detected in him other traits that were as contradictory as the contradictions that pervaded his home.

This contradictoriness marked Nathan, also, but in him its outward manifestation was modified by traits so strongly national that the old folk about N—— were wont to say: “The lad is Squire Wolcott over again!” But those old folk only judged from the outside; and if Squire Wolcott could have seen the heart and known the workings of this, his

youngest grandson's, mind, he would hardly have recognized the likeness.

In fact, Nathan was, in many points, very like his father; he possessed the same patience in overcoming difficulties, and the same intense love for nature, and beauty of form and color. But he had not the same versatility of temperament, that seemed to have centred in Victor, whose suppleness of mind, combined with something like wariness, was a never-ceasing cause of irritation to straightforward, outspoken Nathan.

It was not that Victor often told an actual falsehood, but rather that he had a facility in giving impressions according to his own wishes, and a ready use of language that could make a word-picture as easily as the photographer catches a sun-type, only with not the same truth of likeness in detail.

Nevertheless, while Nathan was lacking in ease of utterance, and quick imaginings in anticipating events or relating boyish experiences, he was the one most apt to appreciate sentiment, though he was entirely free from sentimentality. And the hazy, dream-like mental atmosphere which often surrounded Victor, and which held a half-real, half-emotional delight for him, Nathan banished from his mind as speedily as the mist of dawn vanishes

before sunrise; for his idea of enjoyment, as well as his instinctive methods of thought, were both thoroughly after the New England type. Even as a child, he never knew the sunny abandonment to pleasure that marked Victor, for, when most happy, he was always somewhat grave and restrained in expression of delight. It was as though he felt the dignity of the freedom that had cost his country so hard a struggle, and that made the moral nature mean so much to those stalwart men, and brave women whom he called ancestors.

And yet—and here again we are met by a contradiction—his temperament was decidedly poetic, which must always involve feeling through the emotions and imagination, and this he did; hence his tendency to go to extremes. While another pronounced trait in this hero of our story was, that nothing ever escaped his notice; for when he was a mere baby-boy, his mother often felt that he read the thought in her mind before it found expression in words.

In appearance he was strikingly like Squire Wolcott. Indeed, it is not often a young face so resembles an older one, for to look at the portrait of the Squire was almost like seeing the boy himself. It hung in the north parlor, opposite the one of Adolph Parret which I have already described, and

it would be hard to find two portraits more unlike, and yet both possessing individualities so strong and so full of what goes to make a man interesting in character, as well as in features.

At the first glance, the Squire's would not suggest a handsome man, for in expression it is somewhat too stern, and while the forehead is high, it is slightly receding; indeed, the whole face is long and thin, the cheek-bones prominent and chin pointed, but, unlike Adolph Parret's countenance, the lower part is stronger than the upper. In the matter of dress and general bearing, there is also an evidence of different social surroundings, for the formal, stiff propriety that pervaded the details of Squire Wolcott's costume is quite unlike the elegant nonchalance of the Frenchman's. And yet, after a second look, though they were only pictures, one felt a sense of trust in the plain man that the other failed to inspire.

But I am hardly fair in calling Squire Wolcott a plain man, with the light shining from his eyes as it does in that picture. Eyes that are large and keen, and singularly beautiful in color; and it was the eyes that made one at once think of Nathan, for his eyes were the beauty of his face—in that he was like his mother; and I think it was this similarity of expression that caused the town-people to

call him “Nathan Wolcott,” which he keenly resented, for with the peculiar perversity of human nature his family pride centred around the Parrets, and he clung with warmth to his French ancestry. While with Victor it was just the reverse; for he, though French by name, character, and temperament, held with steadfast loyalty to all that proclaimed his kinship to America.

His father also filled a place in Nathan’s heart that was haloed with an admiration that he in no such full measure accorded to the mother, to whom Victor gave his chief love; and this admiration and affection for the parent least like himself in principle and entire genuineness, is, to my mind, one of the most contradictory parts of Nathan Parret’s character. Though why should it be, when the impulse to admire our opposite is so universal it has become a fact as well established as that clouds herald rain?

Then, too, Nathan’s very sincerity, while it made him sharply vexed with anything like want of truthfulness, made him, at the same time, free from suspicion; for, not knowing deceit in his own heart, he never thought to seek it in others, certainly not in the father, who died while he was still a child. As to the *why* we are attracted by those unlike ourselves, perhaps it is explained by the simple fact that no one likes to see self duplicated, even in a

shadowy, undefined way. For one's own personality is something sacred, since to it our Lord has entrusted the soul, of which, however marred and sin-stained it may become, He yet has said: "Make it in the image of God."

And now we come to a place always a bit difficult in telling the story of a life. For it is hard to know just when to pass from outline to detailed record. But I think I have suggested enough of the influences which surrounded Nathan Parret's early years for us to leave them, and pass on to the time when Victor was twenty-three years old, and Nathan had come to the gateway that opens for youth to enter on the responsibilities of manhood—his twenty-first birthday.

So we will begin our real story now, in the spring-time of his life—in the springtime of Nature's season, too, for the calendar record reads April the twentieth. April!—it is the month of precious prophecy and promise, all pulsing with waking life, hence a blessed season to call one's birthday-time; for in April we only think of hope and progress. Springtime!—we say the words as smilingly as robins trill sweet notes of song; and yet when we use them as a type of life, they must apply either to buds that blossom and ripen into fruit, or to buds that blight and fall.

IV.

“**W**ILL he be a different Nathan to-morrow?”

It was little Patty Gaylord who thus asked, and her eyes were full of eager questioning, as she lifted her gaze to the face of the tall, grave, middle-aged man—her father, the Reverend Abner Gaylord, who ever since Nathan could remember had been pastor of the village church.

The question was a natural outgrowth of the child’s understanding of her father’s words to the young man, for they had all been of the solemn importance of the morrow, which was his twenty-first birthday.

Nathan smiled at Patty’s query, though it fell with something of sombre weight on his heart, and in an undefined way he had been wondering much the same thing. For this twenty-first birthday of his was not only to mark entrance into manhood, but also his assuming of the independent control of large wealth; and with more of interest than he would have been willing to own, he listened for Mr. Gaylord’s reply.

But Patty did not wait for it, for before the tall,

slender figure of her sister Hester came in sight, she caught the sound of approaching steps, and flitted away to meet her, darting swiftly, as a bird wings its way from bough to bough, across the "door-yard"—the familiar name, in those days, for the stretch of land between house and street,—a grassy plot, usually divided by a narrow walk, on either side of which lilac and syringa-bushes were wont to grow.

By her sudden departure, Patty unconsciously gave her father the very opportunity he had been wanting for a conversation alone with Nathan, and with no delay he availed himself of it, saying: "You are well equipped, my young friend, to enter on the warfare of life; you start a soldier, armed with the weapons of a liberal education; you have wealth, and strength, too; but how about the spiritual armor?"—and the good minister laid his hand kindly on the youth's broad shoulder, as he added: "Have you the shield of Faith?"—and knowing, as Mr. Gaylord did, the compass of Nathan's mind, and his poetic turn of thought, he linked with St. Paul's enumeration of a Christian warrior's armor the inspiring verse from John's gospel which reveals that the "sword of the Spirit"—"the *Word of God*"—is the Christ, the "Captain of Salvation."

As he ceased speaking, a hush fell between the two men, while the color deepened on Nathan's already flushed face. He was moved—plainly the minister saw that—and after a minute it led him to press the subject with increased earnestness. “I urge you,” he said, “to accept this very day your high birthright, which is the power of submitting your will to God’s will. It will cost a struggle, my lad, though, for that matter, strife there must be either way; but make no mistake in the Ruler you choose, because there are two voices calling you, and both call to liberty—the one, Christ’s call to the true freedom of a son of God; the other, Satan’s call to the *false* liberty which he misrepresents as freeing a man from the solemn responsibility of the moral law—an impossibility, for ‘that law is perfect,’ and while it encompasses the duty of the Christian, it no less encompasses the worldling.”

Mr. Gaylord’s way of putting this was somewhat new to Nathan, and standing there in the strength and vigor of his young manhood, he felt a thrill of eager longing for conflict. “Try my strength” was in fact the cry of his soul, and God heard it. And later on He did try it; and then Nathan had to learn the only real strength is that made perfect in our weakness, and it was an humbling lesson. Nevertheless, “what makes night within a man’s soul may

reveal stars." And it was the leading of a star which first guided the wise men to Christ.

Perhaps it was as well that at that climax-part of the conversation Mrs. Gaylord came hurrying out to the porch to welcome Nathan home. At least it was thus her husband said when, after the youth's departure, she regretted having interfered with what she felt had been no ordinary interview. To comfort her, Mr. Gaylord had also said: "We must leave it with God, my dear, and prayer will reach Him."

That truth was the anchorage of this minister. He never doubted that God heard, however long the answer tarried, and so he never made shipwreck of his faith. Yet Mr. Gaylord was a man who knew much of struggle in his spiritual life, for he firmly believed "faith without works is dead"; and by nature he was not a working man in the sense demanded in a parish like that of N—— township. He loved too well his books and study for it not to cost him a daily effort to go in and out among the people of his charge; and it often required all Mrs. Gaylord's ready tact to supply her husband's deficiencies in this respect, even though she was a motherly, warm-hearted woman, always glad over the joys of others, and with a ready sympathy for all things in pain, from a bird's broken wing up to an aching heart.

To be sure, sometimes, like all impulsive people, she was lacking in the delicate perception that knows just when to give utterance to sympathy—a trait very marked in her daughter Hester, who never made a mistake in such matters.

The two girls, Hester and Patty, were the only children left in the Parsonage home out of a flock of seven; and Mrs. Gaylord was so grateful for the Love which had spared her these blessings, out of thankfulness for them she dried her tears for those taken, and never lost her cheerfulness. Yet, she was a mother, and mothers never forget; always, though smiles were on her face, she knew there were empty places in the home. And now and then, just between the daylight and the dark, entering the sitting-room suddenly, Mr. Gaylord found her standing by the eastward window, looking out in the dim light toward the village burial-ground. And though in the routine of daily life she was a prosaic little woman, at such rare minutes she would lean her head against her husband's enfolding arm, and look up into his face with eyes bright as Patty's, while she whispered: "The stone is rolled away." And he knew what she meant, for love understands even fragmentary words; then, too, her words were true, for, while there were graves in their hearts, yet they did not seek their

living among the dead. No; for in that home Christ had risen!

It is strange how we all, like Mrs. Gaylord, have two sides to our nature—one sweet and tender, which our best-beloved know; the other just the plain, every-day self the world knows. This last was the side that greeted Nathan Parret, to whom Mrs. Gaylord, spite her genial cordiality, seemed a bit inconsequent.

“Nathan, you here!” thus she exclaimed, adding: “So it was you who came by the mail-coach? and Victor—what of him? Any news yet of the *Sea-Gull*? a stanch sailor, so reported, but according to my reckoning a week overdue—thirty-three days already from shore to shore; time enough, I should say, for any craft, and being a captain’s daughter I ought to know.”

All this without a pause, and more, ready to follow, full well Nathan knew, which accounted for his sudden decision to hasten home, where Aunt Mandy would be watching for him;—“Aunt Mandy” being the name by which Miss Amanda Barstow had been called by Victor and Nathan Parret, ever since their early childhood, when she came to their home to fill the place of half-housekeeper and half-nurse during one of Mrs. Parret’s frequent illnesses, which she did so acceptably, the temporary arrange-

ment became permanent, she staying "to do a mother's part," as she said, for the lads after they were left orphans.

Most faithfully had Miss Amanda done this; for if sometimes she had been stern, she was always just, and Nathan loved her with the warmth of his warm heart. In truth she made "home" for him, for *home* is the heart that holds us dear, and whose welcome is ever ready; and Miss Amanda did hold Nathan as her chief earthly treasure, though she never thought of telling him so. She always had a welcome for him, too, and yet there was scant show of preparation beyond an extra loaf-cake and a vase of flowers set on the table; because, as Miss Amanda reflected: "The boy was as fond of flowers and growing things as bees are of honey."

When once he said he must go, Nathan made no delay over his farewell, though Hester and little Patty had not yet returned. And it was for Hester he had asked when he knocked at the Parsonage door. He had a fine figure, and as he walked swiftly, with his firm, decided step, up the village street, Mr. and Mrs. Gaylord watched him admiringly. In his right hand he carried an old French valise of his father's, the red leather of which had somewhat faded, and the brass nail-heads grown dull; but, if a thing was useful, Nathan was too much of a New

Englander to put it aside because it looked a bit old and worn.

When he reached the outskirts of the village, he sprang lightly over a stone wall that marked the boundary of his own woodland and the road which led to the chateau side of Parret House. But though he walked rapidly, Patty, returning with Hester from the village store, caught a glimpse of him and of the red valise, which made a patch of color as he swung it back and forth in the sunshine; and the sight brought to her memory the question she had not waited to hear answered. And just as Nathan leaped the wall, she repeated it, calling, in the clear, ringing note of her child's voice: "Nathan! Nathan! will you be a different Nathan to-morrow?"

Would he be?

V.

NATHAN could not shake off the influence of Patty's question, prefacing as it did, and then so closely following her father's counsel. And as he entered the wood-road, he seemed to hear it blended in with the sounds with which the air was pulsing, for at that "waking-up" time of the year, every New England dweller knows the world is full of music.

The brook was widened into a swiftly-running creek by the inrushing of a hundred ice-freed streamlets that flowed into it from up among the hills, and it went on its way singing the song of many waters; while the wind that stirred the tree-boughs sent a rustling through the budding branches, and wakened a soft sighing among the pines. It played too with the tufts of pussy-willows and catkins that tasselled the alder bushes till every one seemed a-chime with joy as the early songsters, the first-comers of the spring—robins and bluebirds—flitted in among the tangle.

Sensitive as he was to every influence of nature, all this served to intensify Nathan's already keenly-

aroused sense of the profound earnestness of existence, which never had thrilled his soul as it did that day, for never had he felt the strong-beating pulse of his youth as he did then.

Involuntarily he took off the student's cap he wore, and pushed his short, curly hair back from his forehead, as though the touch of the wind were a baptism of strength. And he drew a long breath of exultant gladness as he looked up through the openings of the trees, and caught a glimpse of the deep blue of the sky, across which white cloudlets floated, like good thoughts in a maiden's soul—such a soul as Hester Gaylord's, this was Nathan's undefined simile. And then, still gazing skyward, almost as though in expectation of some audible reply, he spoke aloud, saying: "Tell me, what does it hold, this future wrapped in my opening life?" But no reply came, for the future is a silent book, and though its every page is written full, it is ever a problem beyond the power of mortal solving. And he knew this, even as he called aloud for an answer. He knew, too, the only safe way of starting on the untried path was to put on the armor of which Mr. Gaylord had spoken. Nevertheless, he was strong of will, and he held back from the full surrender, acceptance of that spiritual armor involved.

Meanwhile, the day was waning, the morrow was drawing near, and, verily, it would dawn on a different Nathan ; though little Patty's eyes, bright as they were, would not note a hint of the difference. For spiritual changes are wont to be subtle, and somewhat slow in stamping their impress on the face of youth. Though truly, I believe, they do every one leave an impress. Think how sorrow will draw a furrow across a man's brow, and joy kindle a light in his eye ; how evil in the heart writes its story on the face, and goodness tells its tale, portraying each trait, till, as time deepens the lines, we come to read their meaning as easily as we read the pages of a printed book.

The change that came to Nathan Parret was not because he made a definite acceptance of false liberty, but rather because he did not accept the true freedom offered. He was willing enough to obey in his own strength and in his own way, and in that strength he did determine to win victory in the on-coming years. For his mind was full of high aspirations for intellectual work, that culminated in visions of brave deeds and glory-winning conquests. But spite this the end would be the story, old as Solomon's words of wisdom,—disappointment and failure,—for there is no way to follow Christ, save by the time-worn path, the law ;

and those ten upward steps, each inscribed with a command, no one ever yet trod in their own unaided strength.

When Nathan left the woods it was nearing sunset, and the long slants of golden light stretched across the meadow lot, reaching on to the chateau-gate. As he expected, Miss Amanda was on the watch for him, though somewhat stealthily, for she was not a person to let her emotions appear on the surface, and yet her heart was overflowing with love for the brothers. In fact, her imagination was as active in castle-building for their future as if she had been a true-born romancer, rather than the thrifty manager of Parret House.

It being her way to strive to hide any manifestation of unwonted tenderness, when Nathan came in sight she called, in almost a harsh voice: "Where have you been loitering? the coach passed the North-side a good two hours ago."

For reply, she found herself warmly kissed by the tall youth, and, spite of a repelling gesture on her part, the glance of her eyes, as they rested on Nathan's comely face, softened, and grew tender as a mother's, and she entered the house with his strong arm encircling her angular figure, for Nathan had no fear of Aunt Mandy's frowns and sharp words;

from a baby he had read her heart aright, and he knew it was a love-warm place.

Those were not the days when much time was spent over the family meals, and scarcely more than an hour after his arrival he had partaken of the early supper, had said a kindly word to the farm hands, and taken a hasty look at the chief favorites of the stable and barnyard. He had a strong man's fondness for the horned cattle, the swift-footed steeds, the sheep and tender lambs, as well as for the vast family of feathered tribes that were counted as farm stock; and, all this accomplished, he was ready for the long, quiet talk with Aunt Mandy, which he well knew she claimed as her part of the general pleasure over his return home.

With the coming on of dark, the wind blew with a chilly freshness that made the fire burning in the huge, open chimney-place a welcome sight to Nathan, as he entered the north parlor,—a room all unlike the stereotyped New England sitting-room of that day, for it was large, and on the walls there hung, besides the portraits of which I have already told, several oil-paintings, of real merit as portrayals of French landscape. The furniture, also, was massive, and gave a stately, old-time air to the room, which was increased by the heavy folds of the crimson moreen curtains that were drawn close

across all the windows save one. It was through that one that a pair of bright, dark eyes looked, not more than ten minutes after Nathan and Aunt Mandy were seated for their evening chat.

Nathan felt he had much to tell; and to Miss Amanda he could speak with freedom of the hopes and ambitions stirring his young heart. Perhaps it was this that gave so grave a look to his face; and seeing it, the smiling eyes pressed close to the window-pane as they peered in, could not long control a laugh from pealing out on the still evening air in a burst of merriment that, with no other warning, proclaimed Victor's arrival, unheralded and unannounced, after the manner of his boyhood, which had always been to appear when least expected.

The fact of his being there was simple enough. Mrs. Gaylord had been right; it was time for the *Sea-Gull* to come to port, and she had sailed into the sheltering harbor of New York bay at sunrise of the day before.

Victor, with no delay, had hastened homeward, and coming the last half of the way by post, he had alighted at the village inn not long after Nathan had left the Parsonage. With his natural eagerness after more of sensation than mere ordinary pleasure was apt to yield, he planned walking from the vil-

lage straight to Parret House, and thus coming, with all the zest of a surprise, into the quiet of Aunt Amanda's twilight hour. But, as he passed the Parsonage, Patty caught sight of him, and at the same time he saw her little face, with its merry blue eyes, rosy cheeks, and short clustering rings of sunny brown hair, and through the open window he heard the note of a high-pitched, childish voice calling Hester to come and see the stranger. Hearing the words, he straightway entered the Parsonage door, which, during his childhood and youth, had been open for him to come and go at his own free will.

Hester, all unconscious of what Patty's summons would lead to, advanced quietly out of the deepening shadows that were gathering in the room, coming into the full light of the western window as Victor opened the sitting-room door. And somehow, Victor Parret, all through the after-years of his life, could at any moment, by merely closing his eyes, see the picture of this simple Puritan girl, as she stood in her calm, gentle sweetness, with the eager child half-hiding behind her tall form.

It is not an easy task to describe Hester Gaylord —she had no beauty, either by claim of regular features or brilliancy of color, and yet there was a quiet graciousness and grace pervading her which

had a more lasting charm than mere beauty, and it was doubtless this which gave her power to influence Victor's imagination; it was so in contrast to his own restless temperament and changing moods, it was to him as the repose of moonlight after a day of turmoil. Even at that hour of his arrival home, after three years' absence, he so felt it that he lingered in the Parsonage parlor till the last ray of sunlight had faded, twilight deepened, and Mrs. Gaylord entered to light the home-made candles that, like tall sentinels in white, stood guard at each corner of the high mantel-shelf. She warmly greeted Victor, for he, like Nathan, had always been a favorite at the Parsonage, and she could scarcely stem her tide of questions for long enough to give her husband an opportunity to add a serious word to his welcome—a word at which Victor evinced sufficient impatience for Hester to lift her calm gaze to his handsome face, and hence she encountered a look which straightway made her own eyes shine. For it bewildered Hester; she was a simple-hearted girl, and though she had been encompassed by love all her life, that look was the first glimpse she had ever received of what the world calls admiration. And later, when sitting in the shadowy light of her own quiet room, waiting for Patty to fall asleep, it came back to her, and

then she smiled. For thoughts of the brothers, when she and they were children, filled a large place in her memory. Through the evening, too, as she sat busy with needlework, her thoughts were still of Victor and Nathan, and at night she dreamed that Nathan called her, and then Victor's voice sounded louder, and seemed to drown Nathan's.

In the strange confusion of sleep she tossed restlessly on her pillow, as though undecided which call to answer. When at last she woke, it was with a sense of disturbance before unknown to her quiet soul; but being a maiden of a healthy nature, quite free from sickly, sentimental fancies, by noon-time she had forgotten the dream, or, rather, it had hidden away in some odd corner of her mind. And there it stayed for long; at least long, as youth counts time.

VI.

THE rule of sharp contrasts which seemed to hover, like a star of destiny, over the Parret brothers, in its encompassing of their material surroundings, as well as in the development of their characters, did not fail to assert itself on the morning of Nathan's twenty-first birthday.

Even Nature was all unlike the yesterday, for what had been a soft, balmy breeze, redolent with the hint of spring flowers and blossoming fruit-trees, had given place to a chill east wind; while across the sky heavy masses of billowy, vaporous clouds were piled, one upon another, till there was not so much as a patch of blue to be seen. An ill-omen, according to superstitious folk, among whom Miss Amanda Barstow would have ranked as a burning and shining light, had she belonged to an earlier age and a less practical race.

Unconsciously, Patty Gaylord echoed Miss Amanda's thought, though the child had no knowledge of either superstition or omen, and with her it was an undefined sense of foreboding, blended with keen regret, that clouds, rather than sunshine, held

sway at the dawning of a day she had looked forward to as belonging to Nathan, and which was to be celebrated—at least, the latter part of it—by a visit to Parret House, where Miss Barstow had planned, in honor of Nathan's coming of age, a “tea-drink,” the then popular mode of entertainment in that region of country, and her invitation to the minister's family included little Patty, who was a special favorite with the kind-hearted spinster.

It was to be an occasion graced by the presence of the leading families in and about N——. Judge Benson, his wife, and daughter; Squire Martin and daughters; the village doctor; the Blakes and Mungers; Emmersons and Endicotts, with a score of others, were all bidden, and were all coming. And the affair was so important to Miss Amanda that, for a full week before its advent, she had been in a constant flutter of preparation, aided by her handmaids, Martha, the farmer's daughter, and Ruth, a black-eyed girl from over the hills. Hester Gaylord, too, had been called in to help, and more than one morning she had spent in Miss Amanda's storeroom, busy over the weighing and measuring of the ingredients needed for the various compounds under preparation; a task Miss Amanda regarded as too important to be intrusted to any hands less skillful than Hester's, and over her do-

ings she kept a general oversight. For she had no idea of yielding the responsibility, even in minor details, of her place as queen among the busy bees of her domestic hive, in which no drone was allowed to loiter, not even a little personage like five-year-old Patty, whose hands were deemed large and strong enough for raisin-seeding, if for no more important work.

It was no wonder, with all this unwonted excitement filling the usually quiet atmosphere of Patty's world, that when she opened her eyes to find the morning dull and gray, with rain and sleet beating against the window-panes, her unrestrained impulse was to find fault with the storm, as though it were a voluntary thing that had unkindly chosen that very day to cover the sky with clouds, and fill the air with moisture which was rapidly forming an icy coating on bush and tree-twigs. Then, too, Patty's gaze could not span the hours till noontime; thus she did not know the very rain-drops with which she found fault would, when the sun broke through the clouds, make the landscape all ablaze with the shining glory of their icy diamonds and crystals, the beauty of which, words can no more than hint. It was like looking on some king's palace, where every corridor was hung with sparkling, glittering jewels.

As Miss Amanda stood in the open doorway, gazing out, with Nathan by her side, she had good reason to be thankful for the superstitious element in her nature, for without it she would not have been so quick to interpret the mute language of emblem and type, which straightway led her to claim the beauty and the glory of that noontide hour as a harbinger of the glory and success that would crown Nathan's future. And after all, she said to herself, "with such a noonday crowning, what matter if there be a stormy morning?" What matter, indeed, when we remember unless there be storms in life there can be no rainbows. "I do set my bow in the cloud, saith the Lord; when I bring a cloud over the earth, *then* the bow shall be seen in the cloud."

All this is a wide wandering from Nathan's waking. The thought that greeted his return to consciousness was Patty's question; and he could not blind the eye of his soul to the truth—that it was answered, and that he was not the same Nathan who, with a heart as free from care as little Patty's, had unlatched the Parsonage gate only yesterday.

Full well he knew, too, what made the difference, and it gave him a sense of dissatisfaction with self, even though self had never seemed of so much importance before,—for, had he not of his own free

will chosen *self* for his guide and master? That emotion of dissatisfaction was the beginning of the spiritual unrest which cast a shadow over so many of the years of Nathan Parret's early manhood, and yet it was his great safeguard. It was an answer to the prayer Mr. Gaylord had felt so sure the God of prayer would hear and answer, for Nathan never lost the memory, though it often lay dormant, that his soul had reached out after an *ideal* manhood. Though he narrowed that ideal to the level of what self could attain,—that lowest tide-mark by which any of us can measure progress, for

“A man's reach should excel his grasp,
Or what's Heaven for?”—

At the same time, the fact of a once-recognized ideal served to stimulate him. It roused, too, his recognition of the infinite possibilities wrapped up in the sealed book of his future.

But all this, and the path by which it led,—the striving and the failure, the false success and the real success, followed by midnight darkness, out of which at last the light of day dawned,—it took long years to accomplish, and we are but just starting on the history of his soul, whose wings, spite that undertone heart-beat of unrest, were on that birthday morning strong for upward flight as the wings

of a young eagle,—the bird that soars skyward, with never a fear of finding air too pure and clarified for his unaided flight to pierce. Unaided—that is the secret of the eagle's downward course, the drooping wing and vanquished strength,—verily, a type of the life of man. So true a type, poets have sung it, preachers have preached it. It is as commonplace as the daisies that grow by the roadside. Perhaps this is the reason we pass it by unnoticed and unheeded, save in those rare moments when we know there is something more in life than mere living, something more in flowers than their beauty and fragrance—“consider the lilies,” and you will catch my meaning.

I think it was a call from that something that summoned Nathan, on his birthday morning, to turn from his musing on the vision side of life—which is wont to be strongly accentuated by a poetic temperament like his,—bidding him seek the other side, that had to deal with the every-day matters of existence. And he obeyed the summons, for God had blessed him with a good share of healthy, commonplace sense, and he accepted the truth that practical pursuits must consign poetic thinking to a secondary place, if a man's life is to amount to anything.

After breakfast Nathan, not heeding the rain,

had gone for a brisk walk and hasty look at his best-loved haunts among the near woods and hills; when he returned he found Judge Benson and Victor waiting for him in the north parlor. As he joined them, Judge Benson was explaining some intricate point of law that had to do with Squire Wolcott's estate. The Judge was a typical New Englander of that time; tall, thin, angular, his face lined with traces of thought and care, his manner stiff and somewhat arbitrary, his voice harsh and ringing, with that peculiar sharpness that has become a national inheritance, and yet, withal, his heart was full of kindness; and though he was shrewd to drive a bargain, he was as true and honest in principle as the oaks of his native forests were strong and masterful among trees.

That the Judge jarred Victor, Nathan noted before he had been with them ten minutes. He noted, also, the difference in their appearance, and he wondered if he presented as marked a contrast to his elegant brother as the County Judge did.

As for Victor, one could hardly fail to notice him; for at that time he was very handsome, very winsome. Nathan smiled with a heart full of brotherly pride as he looked at him, leaning one arm with an easy grace on the high mantel, while the other rested on the head of Major, the

shepherd-dog, whose life had kept pace with the brothers'.

“He is like some picture of a young prince,” Nathan thought, for Victor’s clearly-cut features were sharply defined against the background of gray rain-clouds that were framed in by the window-casement; and when he spoke, it was with an easy fluency, unlike the Judge’s and Nathan’s own somewhat slow speech.

Perhaps there was too much of modern freedom about Victor, and absence of the precision in which he had been trained, for his manner to be altogether pleasant to Nathan; but he was not of a fault-finding disposition, and he had never felt the first touch of petty jealousy. It was equality for which he had combated from babyhood, and the injustice of being allotted to a second place without fair trial that had wounded him; and this was something he was to feel again that day. But it did not occur during the morning hours—they were devoted to the details of business, to which he applied himself with a quickness of perception that won the approbation of Judge Benson, who was not over-well pleased with Victor’s manner of indolent attention and indifference, which were both, to the Judge’s keen eye, assumed to hide his eagerness over the settlement of every penny’s-worth of value, he setting a store on money,

for money's sake, double that which Nathan felt, with all his straightforward questioning of involved details.

Judge Benson was so impressed with the dissimilarity of the brothers that, meeting Mr. Gaylord on his way home, he mentioned it, adding, "There is more real worth in one half-sentence uttered by the younger Parret than in all the high-sounding words of the elder." But the good minister was not over-keen in the matter of reading character, and to him Victor was a comely youth, with an attractive manner, the charm of which had not escaped Mr. Gaylord.

During the discussion on the points of the will that had awaited settlement till Nathan attained his majority, there had been no word of discord between the brothers. But when it came to the division of the old treasures that, from Nathan's earliest recollection, had filled the place of ornaments in the home, his heart felt more than one angry beat over Victor's lack of regard for what had been so dear to his parents. "A heap of rubbish!" he called the glass case containing the birds shot and preserved by M. le Conte during his first year of American life; and the curious shells and specimens of coral that his mother had kept free from every dust-speck, he scorned as only fit for a lumber-

room. Hence it happened that Nathan, in the division of these things, to secure them from disrespect, gave up more than one piece of old family silver marked with the Parret crest.

And, somehow, the glimpse into Victor's heart, or rather heartlessness, which this part of the settlement revealed, was like a streamlet of dividing sympathy between the brothers. Would it broaden with the increase of years? Such streams do grow, till sometimes they stretch like a wide sea between children of the same father and mother. And yet, spite divided interests, lack of harmony, and sympathy in thought and deed, there is that in the tie of kindred that makes it, to earnest natures, a claim stronger than the bond of elective friendship, when it demands self-sacrifice and self-renunciation for a brother's or sister's sake; and Nathan Parret had such a nature. It was his birth-right, inherited from the Puritan ancestry that dated back to the earliest annals of the Wolcotts as settlers in the New World of America.

VII.

THE time of which I tell was before the advent of the precocious modern child. Nevertheless, though children did not then develop into little men and women as speedily as they do now, the grave, earnest responsibilities of life were assumed alike by young men and maidens at an earlier age; and love, marriage, and settlement in homes of their own by the time their years counted not much over twenty, was no unusual event.

But of all this, except in a dreamy way, Nathan Parret had never thought, till the afternoon of his twenty-first birthday,—and yet, when the thought did come, knocking at the door of his heart and mind, he at once bade it enter, for, as he asked himself, Why should it not? He had graduated from the academical department of College when barely nineteen, and was now well on with his course of study at the Medical School, from which the very next July he expected to receive his degree.

He had ample means, too, and he smiled as he thought of Judge Benson's statement of the land and bank stock that were all his own by a clear

title. These thoughts passed through the youth's mind rapidly, and yet they made a vivid picture, even in the moment it took for him to assist Mrs. Gaylord, Hester, and little Patty to alight from their carryall, the first of the many vehicles that arrived at Parret House that April day. And in that minute, too, Nathan recognized that home meant for him the constant companionship of Hester, the pervading sense of her gracious presence, and the sound of her low voice and rippling laugh.

He and Hester had been chosen playmates from babyhood, and as they passed beyond childhood their intimacy had deepened; thus it was not strange that he took it for granted that he was to make life's idyl for her. The possibility that this might not be, he was slow to accept, though the suggestion of it was one of those quick intuitions that had always marked his individuality. A moment spanned the impression; it came from the look he saw in Victor's eyes as they rested on Hester. It was a glance of admiration much like the one she had noted the day before.

Certainly the young girl was well fitted to call forth admiration that hour, for she never had looked fairer. She wore a gown of soft gray material, made simply; her only ornament a knot of blue ribbon that fastened the folds of lace that en-

circled her slender throat and delicate wrists, from which her little hands peeped soft and white, spite the fact that there was not a household task too difficult for them to deftly accomplish. Her feet, too, were tiny as Cinderella's, and arched as any high-born Spanish dame's. In fact, Hester set at naught all traditional theories of high birth. For, while she possessed the fine finish and exquisite repose which we are wont to think comes only to those who can trace direct descent from ancestors of foremost rank in the mother countries, she could point to no heraldic crest, either on her mother's or her father's side.

No; good Mr. Gaylord's father, and his father before him, as far back as they could trace the line of descent, told of plain, well-to-do folk, God-fearing and man-loving, but not laying claim to any title of *Mayflower* importance, or high position according to this world's nomenclature.

As for Mrs. Gaylord, she was the daughter of a sea-captain, whose parents were among the early settlers at Bay Point, a colony largely intermingled with French refugees of the humbler sort. Doubtless it was from ancestry among them that she inherited her bright, versatile temperament, which was tempered by the strong Puritan element dominant in her mother's genealogy.

All this proves that Hester's rare refinement, amounting to elegance, was her own, as a free gift from the Lord, rather than a birthright inheritance. In figure she was graceful, with a supple ease of motion, and though, as I said, not beautiful, every feature was delicate; she was fair-haired, and her eyes blue, but dark, with a wistful look in them that almost amounted to sadness; her mouth, also, though small, and sweet in expression, revealed something of pensiveness. Indeed, Hester's face told of a sensitive nature, as quick to feel a discordant spiritual atmosphere as the mimosa, among trees, is quick to feel the approach of a stranger.

It would be hard to find two friends more unlike than Hester Gaylord and her chosen companion, Judge Benson's daughter Nan, the village belle,—Nan, who was keen at repartee as she was brilliant in appearance. She was small, a brunette, with dark, clustering curls, which she wore drawn back from her face by a bright ribbon of a rich, warm shade of red. Her eyes were black, and flashed one minute with fun, the next were full of earnest questioning—for youth will question, in whatever mould it be cast, either gay or grave.

Though Nan, Hester, and the Parret brothers had been friends from childhood, no shadow had ever come between them, except on the few occa-

sions when Hester, contrary to what one would have expected from her, had taken Victor's part in some dispute with Nathan. Thus, even when children, the enigma of love's outgoing had begun to plead for answer. But it is a riddle no one ever yet has been able to solve, when it has to do with the 'why' a woman like Hester Gaylord gives the priceless pearl of her affection to a man like Victor Parret. Equally strange is it that practical, matter-of-fact maidens like Nan Benson will love, with all the intensity of their natures, some man who lives much in the realm of thought, and who, while he may possess the elements of an old-time knight of chivalry, is without the encircling romance of that early time to cast a mystic glamour over the prosaic details of daily life.

These queries call loudly for solution as we follow the histories of Victor and Nathan; for while Victor attracted Hester, Nathan was the hero of Nan Benson's good, true heart. But she had a New England girl's pride, and so carefully she guarded this secret no one ever guessed it, except Miss Amanda, though, as the years came and went, many wondered why Nan was the only one unmarried of the Judge's six comely daughters. Nan herself knew the reason dated from the hour when she saw Victor's gaze rest on Hester, and the

shadow that fell across Nathan's countenance as he, too, observed that look. Yes, it was then the recognized romance of Nan's life began; and yet she was merry and chatty and positive, seeming quite like herself during the party, and afterward on the way home. Neither did Nathan give any outward sign that he, also, had met that day one of the crisis hours of his life,—a solemn hour to meet, if the saying be true that, as the year holds four seasons before its perfect round is completed, so the soul holds four periods marked by what we may term, for lack of a better word, crisis epochs, that test the true worth of the four most profound experiences in every soul's life: the religious, the intellectual, the emotional—where love holds sway—and that other realm which lies under the control of that part of our character which we call will,—the stronghold of our own special self-hood. I said Nathan had met a crisis hour, but it was hardly more than the prelude to it, for the emotion he felt was scarcely a defined fear. Nevertheless, it had brought him face to face with his own heart, just as on the yesterday he had confronted his own soul. Still, I repeat, he was slow to formulate it into a fact, especially as there was too much of reverence in his thoughts of Hester for him easily to regard her as surrounded by circumstances whose import for other

maidens he would have been quick enough to understand.

How unlike all this to the open admiration of Victor's bold glance! In fact, of all the contrasts that had to do with these brothers, there was none more decided than their way of thinking of this maiden of their choice.—For Victor did love her, in so far as he could love one of her nature, which of necessity set a limit to his affection, for how could he understand that of which he knew nothing? How could he give what he did not have? And alas! even the share of virtues which had been his birthright he had ruthlessly banished during the three years of his life abroad. Hence, now it was the mere outer shell, the tabernacle of the body, that made him so fair and winning, for on that it was not yet time for the soul to tell its story, though keen eyes, like Judge Benson's, could already trace its foreshadowing.

I will not weary you with details of that birthday party; enough that it was pronounced by old and young as entirely successful, and long remembered in the annals of that quiet neighborhood.

In those days the guests assembled about three o'clock in the afternoon, and soon after sundown the majority of them were wending their way homeward, summoned by the homely cares of domestic

and farm life. But, while the older people left thus early, some of the young ones tarried till the warning note of the nine o'clock bell sent them home, too. For that was a summons obeyed as far out among the hills, and across the plains, as its note echoed.

It had been a dull afternoon, the mid-day illumination of the ice-encased trees not lasting longer than the noontide hour. After that the sober gray clouds had gathered again, reaching down to the edge of the horizon, but toward sunset they lifted enough to open a broad belt of deep blue sky at the north and west, and, by the time the last lingerers turned homeward, the belt of blue, which had looked, as little Patty said, like a "path of sky," had widened, and the clouds rolled away, vanishing as clouds so wonderfully do. The moon had risen, too, flooding the landscape with a soft, silvery light.

Those latest lingerers were Hester Gaylord and Nan Benson, Hester having waited to help Miss Amanda carefully replace in the sideboard closet the treasures of dainty India china and Parret-crested silver that had been in use for the occasion. Nan's delay was because she and Hester never willingly separated at the breaking-up of either quilting-bee, singing-school, or the parties of the country-side.

It was Nan who, with no appearance of special thought, tripped before Hester, and intercepted Victor's approach, thus giving Nathan the opportunity her heart divined he desired, of being Hester's escort home by the way of the moonlighted road. This was Nan's first act, after the afternoon's discovery, of putting self out of sight, and she did it as simply and naturally as a butterfly wings from one flower to another; and if, as the legend runs, butterflies be the emblems of immortality, it is a well-chosen type of Nan Benson that hour, for all unselfishness in thought and deed, trifles though they may seem, are parts of the immortal life that is the soul's blessed Hereafter.

Nan had something of the look of a butterfly, too, as she flitted out into the moonlight, with her bright face all aglow with satisfaction over an accomplished purpose. She was wrapped in the warm folds of a scarlet cloak, for, like all brunettes, she loved bright colors; and she wore a scarlet hood, which, in the moonshine, caught the shade of old gold, and had the effect of a frame encircling her dark curls, rosy cheeks, and sparkling eyes.

Even Victor, vexed though he was, could not find fault with so brilliant a companion. And yet he turned for a look at Hester, as she emerged from the shadow of the porch into the full illumin-

ing of silvery light. In that moment, again the look of admiration flashed from his eyes to hers, and,—her glance did not fall beneath the gaze, as it had done the day before, while at the same time there was something in the look which, though it stirred her young heart with an emotion new to it, made her hand rest with a sense of comfort and safety on Nathan's strong arm.

It was not till they reached the turn of the road that the young people parted; then the still air vibrated for a moment with their clear voices, as they called good-night and good cheer.

Nathan and Hester took the way that led to the Parsonage, which was nestled under the shelter of the hillside, like a bird's-nest safe in some bough of strong pine or evergreen cedar. Victor and Nan's path led up the hill, a steep bit of ascent, and then a plain dotted over with houses, among which Judge Benson's was the largest and most imposing. Half an hour later, the brothers met on the threshold of Parret House, but they exchanged no word beyond a quickly-spoken 'good-night'—words we utter so lightly, and yet think of all it means to wish a 'good-night!'

VIII.

I SUPPOSE no one ever yet crossed from youth to the meridian of their life without retaining in their hearts memories of certain days and hours that never lose their radiance.

That moonlight walk with Hester held such a youth-time experience for Nathan Parret, for the impression of it remained with him even to old age. This is not to be wondered at, when we remember the dawning of love in the soul is wont to be, I do not say the most satisfying, but the most beautiful hour life holds for either man or woman. And yet the thoughts that stirred Nathan's heart were destined not to find utterance. For Hester felt it a time when duty demanded that she should urge Nathan to earnestly consider religious truths. The doing this was natural to her, for she was by temperament devout, and the home atmosphere which surrounded her, as fresh air surrounds a flower, had served to deepen her spiritual life; and yet it was not so much by uttered words that she gained sway over those who knew her, as by an unconscious influence. And there were others besides Nathan Par-

ret to whom she seemed one of the “pure in heart who see God.” It was that *seeing* which made the Gospel so wide-spread a page of Love to Hester, for Heavenly Love can find a voice in everything, and one of its whispers to her that hour was that on her rested the responsibility of Nathan’s soul. Then, too, she had no thought of the human love beating in his heart, as he gazed down on her uplifted face, and she never had spoken to him so freely and urgently as she did that evening.

Even his questions, though they were many of them subtle with skepticism, failed to baffle her. This intense earnestness of their conversation did not begin till after they had parted from Victor and Nan, and it did not end till they reached the garden gate, and Nathan had his hand on the latch.

To a nature like his, sensitive to every impression, there was a profound significance, amounting to a spiritual metaphor, in the simple fact that, as his heart had formed the resolution of telling of his newly-discovered hope, Hester delayed the avowal by her gentle pleading with him to begin a religious life.

Did it mean that she was only to fill the place of a holy aspiration in his heart? and was this why, at the very time when his mind was full, as it never had been before, of plans that were to find satis-

faction in this world, she stayed his words by pointing him from earth to Heaven—from self to Christ?

So intense, at that moment, was Nathan's consciousness of a dual existence, that he stretched his hand out into the full light of the moon, as though to make sure it was his very own strong right hand. And then he bowed his head before the conflicting influences swaying him, for he realized it was Hester to whom he listened; Hester who pleaded with him;—and which sounded loudest in his soul, her voice, sweet to him as the sweetest music, or the voice of conscience?

It was the asking of one of the most earnest questions a man can ask, that made this twofold feeling clear. The question was: "Tell me, what do you mean by the Gospel?" For, even as he asked it, in his heart thrilled the reply that was of the earth.

"Gospel—good news"; to him it meant home, with Hester's sweet ministry of love, sanctifying and illumining its every shadow, while he knew to her it was a question all spiritual.

With no more of hesitation than the moon-beams made in falling from the shining orb full and strong on Hester's fair face, she made reply, repeating the words of Saint Paul's brief creed,

—and surely they hold the essential answer: “Christ died for our sins, according to the Scriptures, and He was buried, and He rose again the third day.”

Yes, surely Hester was right in calling this Saint Paul’s creed,—“Christ died for our sins,—and by Him, God can still be just, and yet the justifier of him that believeth,” for verily this is the definition of the Gospel.—“It might be more, but it is always this.” Hardly had the still evening air ceased to vibrate with her words before the Parsonage door opened wide, and a flood of candle-light shone out to meet the moonshine that fell aslant the door-step.

Motherly Mrs. Gaylord had been on the watch for Hester, and at the sound of her voice hastened to thus open wide the home door, through which a moment later she entered, and Nathan was left alone in the moonlight. But in that moment he had had time to whisper, “Remember, always, you are *my* Hester.” And her reply had been a mute clasp of the hand, which she gave with no thought at the time of the deep significance Nathan attached to the action. For he accepted it as a pledge in response to the desire of his heart, which, spite his foreboding of a few minutes before, he felt she must know, even without his telling; thus that seemingly trifling deed of Hester’s came to exert a

life-lasting influence over Nathan Parret. It was strange it happened at the close of the twenty-four hours during which he had twice been urged to enter on the life which would fill his soul with a peace "higher than all thought, deeper than all sorrow."

But Nathan was not ready for that life yet, and so he went on striving to feed his soul on negations, rather than by the positive truth which only could nourish and sustain it.

IX.

THOSE who love country life, and who were reared among the hills, or near the ever-changing sea, know full well the pleasures every recurring season brings. And the April time of which I tell, spite its frequent showers, was no delinquent, for the many clouds that chased one another across the playground of the sky only made the blue deeper and more vivid, by contrast with the gray or white masses of concentrated vapor.

Every day of Nathan's stay at home heralded some new pleasure for the young people about whom the interest of our story centres. Even Victor, fresh comer though he was from the artificial enjoyments that he had called pleasures, during the years of his sojourn in a foreign land, entered with zest into the simple delights that had belonged to his boyhood. He was in love, too, and that illumined the every-dayness of his surroundings with a glory unlike any other kindling—for, to a lover's eye, a buttercup is golden, and a crystal is a gem.

Not once had Victor's interest failed, and so the last day of the week, Saturday morning, dawned clear and bright.

On the Monday, Nathan was to return to his studies, not to come home again until the close of the summer term in July, when he was to say farewell to college haunts and college friends, and, armed with his professional degree, to start in good earnest on the work of life.

The sense that it was the last day in which, all together, they could celebrate the spring of the year, caused both Hester and Nan to be astir an hour before sunrise, Saturday being a busy day in New England homes, pressing, as it did, the tasks of two days into one, which all must be accomplished before sundown; for, according to the custom of the time, the last golden ray of light that faded from the tree-tops was the herald that hours sacred—as set apart for a time holy unto the Lord—had come, and naught must interfere with their rest and calm.

So universal was this observance, there was not a home in all that country-side in which it was neglected. For, while those early fathers and mothers were stern and steadfast opponents to all that savored of bondage to the traditions of the Church from whose rule they had sought escape by seeking new homes in a new land, they yet unconsciously enforced many a custom that could be traced back to the Church whose traditions they so stoutly set

aside as cunningly-devised fables of man's wisdom ; and, among them, surely was the one of observing Saturday night. This you will find to be true, if you ask any faithful member of the Romish Church, for with reverence they will tell you that " Saturday is the most blessed of the week-days, for it is the mother of Sunday."

It was not an hour after noon-time, and that means after an early dinner, when, their tasks accomplished, Nan's jaunty figure, and tall, graceful Hester, with little Patty by her side, were waiting at the turn of the road for the brothers, who had promised to guide them across the fields, through the woods and thickets, and over mill-pond bog, to the sunny hillside, where, sheltered by the warm blanket of last year's fallen leaves, they were sure to find the sweetest, the largest, and the pinkest arbutus of all that region. True enough, it was all a-bloom, ready for the gathering. Clustering tufts of the waxy bells, some pale as children of shadow, some rosy as fleecy clouds at sunrise, were peeping out from under the yellow leaves, like smiles playing over the time-worn face of some aged man or woman ; while, as for the anemones and baby-blues, they blossomed in a profusion that made the leaf-strewn ground look like a yellow carpet spread over with flowers.

In less than five minutes Patty's basket was full, and yet her gathering had made no break in the stretch of blossoms that reached far up the hillside, for not so much as one little space looked empty. It was Hester who noticed this—Hester, who all her life long had been guarded from trouble, but who, nevertheless, had mourned with a child's intensity over the brief stay of the little brothers and sisters God had taken Home to Heaven while she was still a child. Perhaps it was the thought of those little graves over in the churchyard, on which she knew, later on, her mother would lay some of the blooms with which Patty had so gleefully heaped her basket high, that caused Hester to say: "If we could only go through life picking flowers, as Patty pulls them, and yet, after all our gathering, leave no empty place lonely for those we take!"

Something in her words, for a moment seemed to dim the brightness of the day for Nathan, but he was mentally strong and healthy; he was young, too, and his life was now in the outward and the events of the present. And his melancholy musings were but momentary, for, after all, though Hester's words held the hint of a sigh, why might not her wish be granted? Why might not flowers, in a world so full, be gathered, and yet no vacant place left?

Perchance wisdom strove to whisper they might, if brothers would not want the same flower,—but Nathan shut his heart that day to wisdom's whisper. He was glad in the beautiful present, which is the heritage of youth, and it is a blessed heritage, as those who pass out of its charmed circle all too sadly know. For, while to the Christian there is infinite rest and peace in leaving all with the Heavenly Father, who orders all in love, we do not come to anchorage in the still waters of that calm, till the frail bark of our life has known the storm-tossing of beating winds and dashing waves.—And sometimes, even though at last it cross the Harbor bar, it is well-nigh a wreck, with torn sail and rent cordage.—But in youth the taking no thought for the morrow is truly as care-free as the “lilies, who toil not, neither do they spin, and yet Solomon, in all his glory, was not arrayed like one of them”; for Solomon's glory was the glory of wisdom, and wisdom is the price of a costly education in the school of discipline. Nevertheless, it is worth all it costs, if at last, when the conflict is over, we are permitted to join the chorus of the angels, singing :

“Worthy is the Lamb,
That hath been slain,
To receive the power,
And riches, and wisdom, and might,
And honor, and glory, and blessing.”

Nathan did not think of all this, but he did think of the truth every lover of flowers knows—that the surest way to win blossoms is to pluck the blooms. But in this thought, he again refused to hear wisdom's sequel: "Be willing that another hand than your own should gather them."

It was not till the sunny hour that prefaces sundown that our young folk turned homeward, every one of them with their arms laden full of flower-treasures; so full that trailing sprays of the tufted arbutus-blossoms drooped to the very ground from little Patty's bountiful load, which was destined to supply "Sunday flowers"—as, taught by Hester, the sweet child called them—not only for her father and mother, but for Miss Amanda; enough, also, to fill the largest of the blue-china jars that stood on either side of the wide, open fireplace in the north parlor of Parret House.

Leaving the hill, their shortest path was by the wood-road, Nathan's favorite way of approach to the chateau side of the mansion, now his own property, that part of the estate being designated as his portion by the terms of his father's will. The sun was still so high above the horizon there was time for them to tarry, while Nathan and Hester made search among the library shelves for a book Mr. Gaylord wanted; Nan and Victor, meanwhile sit-

ting down on the wide doorstep, their busy fingers pulling away the dry, dead leaves that were knotted in with the dark green ones of the living plant, and in some places tangled close around the flowering stems.

This was Patty's opportunity to run round the corner of the house to the north door, in search of Miss Amanda, whom she was pretty sure to find at that hour of the day sitting in the parlor in her high-backed chair, attired in her afternoon frock of carefully made-over black silk, and with knitting-work in hand; and as Miss Amanda's knitting was quite as much a matter of feeling as of sight, her chair was wont to be drawn close to the window looking out toward the high-road, so that no one approaching or leaving the house, on that side, could escape her keen gaze.

Nathan, although he knew almost every volume in the old library, failed to find the one wanted; the only remaining place in which to seek it was a high shelf over his father's secretary. Springing up lightly, he balanced himself on the open desk-panel, while with one hand he held on to the projecting shelf, and, with the other, passed book after book down to Hester. This was how they came to find a volume that was destined to hold a marked place in the development of Nathan's life. It was the

legend of St. Christopher, which was recorded in French, a language as easy for Nathan to read as the plainest page of English print; but he was somewhat slow in translating it for Hester, and it was not till they rejoined Victor and Nan that either of them caught the full significance of the parable-story. For Victor, to whom Nathan handed the book, read it with an easy fluency that made every word glow with life and meaning for Nathan. Hester, too, listened with the starry light in her eyes that came into them when she was deeply interested. Nan also saw beyond the mere words of the tale, while Patty—who had returned just as Victor began to read—stood spellbound, and, with a child's glimpse of a truth sometimes missed by older people, she eagerly exclaimed, as Victor came to the last line: “Nathan, oh Nathan! do you remember father said you were to be a different Nathan after your birthday, and will you be like Saint Christopher?” “A modern Saint Christopher!” It was Victor who repeated the words, but in his voice there sounded a note of mocking scorn, while Patty’s had thrilled with earnestness, and her eyes shone with a light bright as that which deepened the blue of Hester’s. Strange to say, Nathan, quite contrary to his usual seriousness, made a laughing reply, saying: “Yes, little Patty, I will

seek the strongest Ruler," and playfully he enumerated one Master after another, running through a list which numbered Love, Knowledge, Strength, Wealth, and many other Master-powers in a man's life. Then followed a conversation gay with reパートee and merry words, Nan pressing the question, "What then?" as one Ruler after another failed; till at last Hester interrupted, bidding them note how near the sun was to sinking behind the boundary-line of the hills, which Patty called the day's night-cap.

It was full time to turn homeward; already Miss Amanda had folded up her knitting-work, and opened Squire Wolcott's family Bible, which filled the place of honor on the mahogany claw-table that stood beneath the Squire's portrait. But before she turned a leaf of the Holy Book, she stood by the window, shading her eyes from the last bright sunbeams, as she watched the little group pass out of the garden on to the high-road. "Would her heart's desire be granted?"—thus she queried, "and Nathan, the brave, true lad, walk life's road hand-in-hand with sweet Hester Gaylord?"

A shrewd smile played for a moment across Miss Amanda's somewhat stern face, as she murmured: "Victor and Nan would be well mated; she would not fear to tell him of his faults, and they are

enough," the good woman added, with a sigh, as she continued to muse aloud, saying: "But Hester and Victor, if they were to wed it would be nothing but sorrow. Why, he would hurt the girl's gentle heart twenty times in the day, and yet, after all, it would simply be because he was himself, and thus as unable to understand her as a sea-coast rock would be unable to understand a fragile shell, tossed against its jagged edge by some in-coming wave; and Hester would go hungering all her life long for what Victor could never give, till at last she would die of hunger"; and, with a sharp snap, she pulled-to the close window-shutter, as though to hide from her imagination the picture fancy had painted. Was Miss Amanda Barstow a prophetess, in her simple way? And when she spoke of dying, because of a hungering heart, did she forget that only on the last Sabbath Mr. Gaylord had said, "The true way to know life was by living"?

X.

“ON Sunday, Heaven’s gate stands ope.” Never were these words of George Herbert’s more fully verified than on the Sabbath that prefaced Nathan Parret’s home-leaving for a stretch of time that bounded many a month more than he then anticipated.

The sun rose bright and clear, and the earth seemed enfolded with the calm of an infinite peace, while the sky was an over-arching dome of blue—the pure blue of an unclouded sky; not a flat, dead expanse of unbroken color, but one that seems quivering with “a trembling transparency of penetrable air.” Over everything rested, too, the solemn hush which broods, as at no other time, in the air of a Sunday morning.

I often wonder how we could bear the restless, pressing eagerness of life, were it not for the regularly recurring rest of the Sabbath. Even Nature admits the claim of the holy time that fills a place amid the turmoil of the week-day world, akin to that a rest fills in some long strain of music, which, without it, would fail to yield the full harmony of

the melody. But remember that, "while, as there is no music in the mere rest, there is the making of music in it," so there is no blessing in the mere coming of the Sabbath, only as we make it by appropriating the

"Blessings that are plentiful and rife."

And to do this we must set ourselves "to learn the tune," heeding the rests, for "they are not to be slurred over, or omitted," since without them our Life's music will be a discord.

On that Sabbath morning Nathan was awake at sunrise; he even saw the morning star, and the pale orb of the moon that sank behind the western hills as the sun, like a globe of gold, came sailing up from beyond the edge of the eastern horizon. He was keenly sensitive to the influences of the day, and he was glad that hour of its dawning, for it was a time hallowed and sacred by happy memories that reached far back into the years of his childhood.—For, spite the rigid observance of the hours, which, at that time, filled an active New England lad with a certain dread, Miss Amanda was of too cheerful a temperament to let anything like gloom oppress the brothers. And yet she never allowed either of them, during their boyhood, to escape the Sunday discipline of Catechism and

Commandment recital. Nathan was ready, and waiting for her that morning on the doorstep, full five minutes before the ringing of the second bell, at the first sound of which she appeared, in all the decorum of her Sabbath attire—the folds of her ample gray stuff-gown free from minutest dust-speck, while her black silk shawl was as fresh as though it had not done service ten years or more. Her bonnet-strings, also, were as guiltless of crease or fray as if tied for the first time, and the long lace veil that had been a gift from M. le Conte years ago was good as new.

Apart from her dress, on her kindly face there was a Sunday look—a certain expression of peace—that belonged to the hour; and it deepened as she caught sight of Nathan waiting for her. Indeed, Miss Amanda's cup of happiness was full when, as she and Nathan passed beyond the garden gate, steps announced Victor hastening to join them.

The church, or meeting-house as the country-folk called it, was within walking distance, and Miss Amanda was not one to "harness up" of a Sunday morning, unless absolutely necessary; it being her belief that if the Apostle Paul thought it worth while to remember the "groaning creation," it was no less her duty to enforce rest for man and beast. And so it was a day free from all unnecessary labor,

to the remotest parts of the farm, where, till Victor's return, her will had ruled supreme. How it would be with him as master it was too soon to tell, save from the hint of change his half-playful satire suggested as he maintained that, in Miss Amanda's domain, the dogs dared not bark on Sunday, while the chickens and ducks cackled and quacked a jargon a dozen degrees softer than their usually high-pitched note. Be this as it may, certain it is the sweet, solemn stillness was unlike any other quiet, and ordinary sounds did not seem to disturb it with their week-day harshness.

It was a pleasant sight to look up and down the long street of the village, for by every road entering it, from north and south, east and west, came vehicles of well-nigh endless variety, from the single buggy to the three-seated farm wagon which held the entire family, sometimes represented by members of three or four generations. And all were wending their way toward the Lord's House, to keep Holy Day.

The services were arranged to meet the convenience of these many comers, for N——, being the county-town, its meeting-house was the Sunday nucleus of the widely-scattered population. The first service was devoted to prayer and praise, with a sermon more doctrinal and emphatic than that

which followed at the second assembling of the congregation, after the noontime intermission ;—a time during which the children of the flock were regaled on doughnuts, ginger-cracks, and seed-cakes, while the elders exchanged greetings, and discussed the sermon and parish news—the sober, grave-faced men gathering in little knots by themselves, and speaking in subdued tones of matters of import, while their wives kept up a lively interchange of opinions on the subjects most interesting to women who seldom met, save during the brief Sunday nooning.

Meantime, the rosy-cheeked maidens and sturdy youths made half-whispered plans for pleasures, that varied with the changing seasons, autumn being celebrated by singing-school and nutting frolics; winter by quilting-bees and candy-pulls; while spring and summer held numberless excursions after flowers and berries, among the wooded hills that surrounded N—— as the mountains are round about Jerusalem.

Among the group of young folk Victor was a noticeable figure that day, dressed, as he was, in a new suit of broadcloth made after the latest Parisian fashion; and many were the shy glances the country maidens cast at the two brothers. For Nathan, too, was unlike the sturdy young farmers in their

homespun suits of butternut. The brothers held, also, a prominent position among the landholders of the neighborhood, and that gave an added interest to their fine personal appearance.

Earnest-minded Mr. Gaylord was always deeply impressed with the responsibility of his sacred office as proclaimer of the Gospel, and Victor and Nathan had been much in his thought during the preparation of his sermons for that day. There was a stiff formality in his manner of delivery that now would win a smile; but, according to the prevailing taste of the times, it only served to add force to his original and somewhat quaint way of presenting the truth. Those were days, too, when "the minister" was regarded with a reverential awe that invested his utterances with the majesty of law. And when he came to the most solemn parts of his appeal, the assembled congregation were so still even the restless stirring of a child could be heard.

The morning discourse was, perhaps, the most powerful, the very text riveting immediate attention: "The soul that sinneth, it shall surely die." It was a sermon that might with profit be repeated in these days, when the very air is pulsing with the vexed questions of eternal death and probation. "Man's life"—thus Mr. Gaylord began—"is as

much on one side the grave as on the other. He does not drop himself when he enters on immortality. It is *self* that is the immortal part of him, and it is the intensifying and revealing of the real *self* which makes his Heaven or his Hell.”—And in the vivid language used at that time, he had pictured a sinful soul immortalized; his voice thrilling with deep emotion as he added, “and that is Hell.”—And then he turned to picture the soul in which good becomes master—good that, borne up by the wings of faith, soars beyond the control of evil; and in a tone gentle as that by which a mother soothes a restless child, he softly said: “When this—the blessed mastery of good—begins, then Heaven is begun.” This is the substance of the prelude, followed, according to the method of the time, by diversions reaching from firstly, on, till they were counted by double figures.

“Divine Condemnation” was the title given to that sermon by more than one of Mr. Gaylord’s listeners. And he argued that condemnation was already begun. “He that believeth not *is* condemned already.”—The kingdom of Heaven being within,—the misery of Hell being within, for within lies the blessing, as within lies the woe,—Man not being barred from Heaven by close-shut gates, for “the gates of it shall not be shut at all.” “Hence

it is self"—thus Mr. Gaylord pleaded—"that shuts out from heaven, the great dividing sea being character."

I will not tarry to detail more of that sermon. I have quoted enough to show the warning it held for Nathan, which was not left to rankle in his mind as a bald statement of warning alone, for the discourse which followed in the second meeting for worship was full of tenderness, and made very real the promise of the white robe given to him that overcometh by faith. Yet there was no hiding of the truth that the life of faith involves many a struggle, for "the soul of man is a battle-ground." And, after all, the success is not in us, but in Christ. "Thanks be unto God, who giveth us the victory, through our Lord Jesus Christ."

Through Christ,—that was the key-note of Mr. Gaylord's second sermon, as well as its Amen. With the echo of his words sounding in their hearts, the people of his charge gravely separated; and by three o'clock the rhythmic music of horses' hoofs and rumbling wheels had ceased, while the long line of hitching-posts and sheds back of the church were left solitary till the coming of the next Lord's day. During the walk home, Miss Amanda did not exchange more than an occasional word with the brothers. Nathan, too, was silent, for he was not

one to call attention to the fact that an angel had stirred the waters of his soul that day. But no such reserve held Victor quiet, and the careless irreverence of his light, shallow criticisms of "the minister's" discourses shocked Miss Amanda almost as much as if he had used profane language—for criticism was not then, as now, the fashion.

We have lingered so long over the fore-part of that Sabbath, there is but brief space left to tell the story of the latter part; and yet it held two visits that, in their influence over Nathan, demand recital in this record of his soul's life.

XI.

THE first of the visits was to the Parsonage, where Hester met Nathan with a smile, though there was a wistful look in her blue eyes that he did not fail to see; yet, during the hour of his stay, they had no minute alone in which he could ask her its meaning. Perhaps if he had, she could hardly have told him; anyway, they parted with no word of the future, save the general wish for success, in which every member of the household shared, from the grave father to merry little Patty. Hester did follow him to the doorstep, but there Victor met them, and Nathan, as he turned away, could hardly be said to regret that his love was still unspoken; for there had always been a sweetness to him in keeping his dearest aspirations and hopes silent in the shelter of his own inner thoughts. He felt, too, as restful an assurance in the pledge of Hester's significant hand-clasp as if, by words, she had acknowledged him the winner of her heart.

I do not think either of them were to blame for

the misunderstanding, and yet, when one thinks of all it involved, it is hard not to wish that Hester had never given that mute sign. For, after it, Nathan had banished the lingering, undefined sense of disturbance that had thrilled his heart when he had seen Victor's look at Hester. Being strong of will, it was easy for him to do this, and he took no thought of the lesson he had been bitterly taught more than once, which was that when his and Victor's desires were for the same thing, it was Victor who usually won the prize.

It was when their wills were opposed that the contrast between the two brothers was most apparent. For, as is so often the case with members of the same family, while the rudiments of their characters were much alike, their development was markedly dissimilar. They were both proud, ambitious, and self-willed, but Nathan's pride scorned to harbor a mean or dishonorable thought, and the giving of a false impression was to him as lowering to self-respect as an uttered falsehood. Indeed, in his reverence for truth he rivalled the most stalwart truth-lover in the long line of upright Wolcotts from whom he descended. As for his ambition, it was never a paltry desire for praise, but it was for power, and the maintenance of what, among his boyhood and college companions, had been called fair play. This,

as he grew older, came to mean the maintenance of truth and right.

It was the possession of these traits that, after he yielded self-will to God's will, and consecrated power to God's service, made it possible for Nathan Parret to attain the influence over hearts and minds that won for him the title I have chosen for the story of his life. Not that more than one or two of those whom he helped most ever put this thought into words; indeed, to many of them the term Saint would have been nothing more than a suggestion of monastery cell or friar's robe, and all unlike a descriptive title of the strong, broad-shouldered, muscular, middle-aged man known as Nathan Parret. But our present acquaintance with him is long before that time, and now we see him as he was in the first days of manhood, when even the mind of an earnest, true-souled youth is wont to be a place seething with conflicting thoughts and aims, —a time when the past of young life is seeking to adjust itself with the present, and at the same hour striving to grasp the longed-for future.

Victor, though two years older, was passing through much the same crucial experience, while with him the traits I have delineated as helping to form Nathan's character were even more pronounced. But his pride made him sensitive to any

slight, and on the alert for it, and with him ambition was not so much a desire for real power as for the attainment of a high position, as the world ranks; while his self-will was a fixed determination to gain his own way, at whatever cost. In his soul, too, there was no real recognition of God, though he hid this for many months from Hester Gaylord and her parents, making an outward show of religious observance, when in fact all the religion he had was a superstitious awe, that, if it restrained him, did so from the poorest motive that can influence any soul—mere fear.

Spite all this, he was awake to the poetic side of events and people. It was this quickness of perception which led him to admire Hester, and to his cultured eye, trained to note grace and ease in manner and motion, as well as general refinement of bearing, she at once assumed the interest of a poem. This she divined sufficiently, before Nathan left home, for it to make her long to explain to him the simple meaning of her silent response to his question; for the new emotion stirring the old-time calm of her soul, added to the quick intuition of a woman, made her conscious that he had meant by it more than she at first thought. She was conscious, too, that suddenly his always before outspoken, frank affection had changed, and it be-

wildered her, just as Victor's look had bewildered. To Nan Benson, both would have been plain as an open book, but Hester was like a plant that lifts up its sweet flower for sunshine and shadow to fall upon, without asking why the sunshine warms and the shadow chills it. Then, too, the action was very unlike her usual seriousness, and this troubled her, for anything like playfulness seemed a wide digression from their grave conversation, which had dealt with the solemn reality of life. Thinking of it thus, Hester's sensitive conscience grew more and more distressed; and so strong became her desire for an explanation, she called Nathan back after he had said good-bye, and passed beyond the door-yard gate. But at that moment Victor laughed a merry peal, and the gentle sound of her voice was lost in his louder tone. It was thus that, when affection was stirring her heart for the younger brother, the elder came between her and its expression.

XII.

NATHAN'S second visit was to the village cemetery—a dreary place, for New England people, save with rare exceptions like Mrs. Gaylord, had not then noted the Gospel word telling that our Lord's own sepulchre was in a garden. The spiritual life of the time, too, held back from making the grave a place of beauty, as tending to centre the Christian's vision on that which had to do with the mortal, rather than the immortal. But, a century later, they did notice that *garden* word; and, since then, they have not feared to make the place of graves a place of flowers, and thus an ever-speaking parable of dying to live, which is the yearly-repeated resurrection anthem of the up-springing green things upon the earth, that "magnify and praise the Lord forever."

Ever since the five-acre field back of the church had been set apart for sacred use, as a burial-place, the plot of ground Nathan sought had been known as the "Wolcott Lot." It was a neat enclosure, surrounded by a fence of sharp-pointed pickets, painted a glaring white, that made every separated

picket assume the form of a white spear-head when seen in the half-twilight, which was the hour of his visit.

Within the enclosure was a double row of mounds, all covered with the tender green of the young grass-blades that the April showers had watered into fresh life. Every mound was marked, too, by a stone, either of granite or time-stained marble—for the last interment had been more than ten years before, when God called Mrs. Parret from earth; and, ten years writes its story, even on the marble of a gravestone—such a narrow space on which to trace the two great epochs, birth and death; words that we utter well-nigh every day, and yet our human language persists in placing the last first and the first last, for death is our portion *here*, life our heritage *There*;—the abiding life, of which it is promised, “we die no more.” As Nathan stood looking down on the graves of his parents, he vaguely pondered this constant dying, which is the very atmosphere of the soul from its first hour on to the last of earthly existence. Think what a constant casting aside of the former things belong to it—how ignorance dies as knowledge widens, and how, with every added year, there is the discarding of one, and then another, of the dry husks of the bygone from the golden-eared corn of the present,

till at last the chaff in among the wheat is sifted, and we enter on the life where all things are new. Reared as Nathan had been, in the very centre of contradictions,—a fact revealed by one glance at his home,—it seems strange that it had escaped him till that minute, when, as he looked at his father's and mother's graves, and read the inscriptions traced on the stones that marked them, he suddenly saw how unlike was the suggestion of their two lives, even as told by those brief records. His father's was inscribed: “Adolph Parret, second son of M. le Conte Parret, of Chateau Bois, France.” As Nathan gazed on the words, he felt as though his French ancestry were looking out at him from the letters cut in the marble. And his thoughts were vivid and picture-like as in imagination he saw dark-eyed, vivacious women gliding in and out of the far-famed Parisian *salons*, where conversation was the chief pleasure,—those brilliant French women of an earlier day, who were the friends of poets and scholars, and among whom ranked high his paternal grandmother. It was this blending of genius with social intercourse that had always held a fascination for Nathan; and in his thought of it, he included not only the women, but men, for though he knew no longer knight-errants with glittering casque and poised spear rode in tilt and tournament, in his mental picture he saw the

chivalry of France ;—men Quixotic, perchance, and romantic, but real and brave, nevertheless, like his father's hero and patron, Lafayette. Turning from this courtly company, Nathan read the simple record on his mother's gravestone: “Prudence, daughter of Nathan Wolcott, and relict of Adolph Parret”—that was all. But it was enough to waken memories of his mother, and he thought of her as young and fair as Hester, and as true and pure of heart; and tears dimmed his eyes, as he stooped to train a bit of sweet-briar which had sprung up between his parents' graves from a seed blown by the summer wind over from the bushes that edged the roadway. So firmly had it rooted, he knew, when June-time came, it would bud and blossom, a flush of pink with a golden heart. Meanwhile, though it was naught more than a leaf-budded stalk, there was that in Nathan's mind which made it eloquent as a poem. Yet, I repeat, it was nothing but a sweet-briar rose, growing between two graves!

He tarried so long in the cemetery, the stars were twinkling bright when he turned homeward, never thinking of Nan Benson, who had done little since sundown but watch the turn in the road, she felt so sure he would come to say good-bye. But, when he did not, Nan gave no outward sign of regret, and the next day her nerves were as steady,

and her words as merry and gay, as ever. This is a way some women have of bearing disappointment all through their lives ; though Nan did not, even to herself, acknowledge disappointment. And yet such things sometimes fulfil the mission of discipline quite as much as those that tell their story in an open way by what we are wont to call “commonplace trials.” Though I refuse to admit that there is such a thing as commonplace, when the experience deals with aught so subtle as the heart of man or woman ; and certain it is there never yet were two beings who read just the same story, either of joy or sorrow, for “the rule of humanity is, that every separate soul is quite exceptional.”

When at last Nathan reached home, and opened the front door, he was greeted by a flood of light that rivalled the stars, Miss Amanda having left a lighted lamp on the hall table, and by it stood two shining brass candlesticks, one for each brother, and each holding a mould that looked like a long white finger ; for Miss Amanda’s candle-moulding never failed to produce candles clear as wax, with wicks which did not vary from the exact centre so much as a hair’s-breadth.

Nathan only gave a passing thought to Victor’s absence, but, long afterward, he remembered how he had left him standing on the Parsonage doorstep

with Hester. And when he thus recollects, with the way memory has of reproducing bygone impressions, he seemed to hear the sound of Victor's laughter as plainly as though it were an echo no farther removed than yesterday. Going up-stairs, he called good-night as he passed Miss Amanda's half-opened door, and then he turned to the narrow passage-way which led to the chateau side of the house, in which had been his room from boyhood. It was small, and simply furnished, and the outlooks from the windows were bounded by a clump of maple-trees that grew so close together their branches were interlaced, and when the wind was high they patted against the panes like some beckoning call from the outside world—a sound that many a time had startled Nathan. Nevertheless, those trees were dear as friends to him, for all the unspoken poetry that in childhood had sung in his heart he could tell them, feeling sure their murmuring leaves would give no hint of his secret musings. Their gnarled and jagged bark, too, had always been like a picture-gallery to the imaginative lad, for, after a rain or heavy dew, the moisture brought out lines and hues that formed strange, grotesque faces and figures, delicate as though traced by a pencil. And sometimes he would fancy he saw Indian maidens, sweet as Minnehaha, the Laughing-

water; then, again, shapes like birds and animals would appear.

But the associations with the trees Nathan most prized centred round the living birds that, every spring-time, built nests among the leafy boughs—gray-coated sparrows, robin redbreasts, and blue-birds; while, high up, swinging from the slender twig of some out-reaching branch, orioles hung their homes, which were made of bits of moss and soft, downy things gathered from far and near. That night, putting out his candle, he looked through the uncurtained window, skyward, and his gaze penetrated the network of delicate twigs, among which there had been a great swelling of tender buds for the last month. But it was not of budding twigs Nathan thought, so much as of the nest-building time they heralded. And then his mind wandered beyond the trees and their stories to Hester, who was holy to him as Noah's dove; and he smiled at his fancy of likening her to that hope-bringing bird, while he pictured himself as reaching out toward her the sceptre of his deepest reverence and love, as the Eastern king extended it to the royal Esther of old. But we have tarried long enough over this preface-time of Nathan Parret's history. For, after all, it is but like the rosy light of morning sunshine, that so speedily ascends the

plane of the sky toward its meridian brightness; and we must speed on, if we are to keep pace with it, even though the story of early morning holds a sweetness and a freshness the later hours never know.

PART II.

“The goodness of God is a goodness that does not shrink from the inflicting of suffering. And, without shadowing our hearts with unfilial fear—for sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof—we should yet be collecting something of the strength of preparation, through some forecasting of the soul, some occasional questioning of ourselves as to how we should endure what God, in the infinitude of that holy Love which will not shrink from any needful suffering, may have to ordain for us.”—THOM.

*“‘Who will give me his heart,’
Said God, ‘my Love he shall find’;
With that speech a resplendent sun
Fell into my mind.”*

I.

FROM a child Nathan Parret had been keenly alive to the influence of changing seasons. And never had spring and summer seemed so full to him of Nature's manifestation of beauty as it did during the weeks which, since the waking-time in April, had continued an unfolding of glory till July was fast waning before the near advent of August. It had been a summer marked by days when the sunshine was a blaze of golden light, and the sky deep blue, with that clearness of color that is a resplendent sapphire. The trees, too,—even the oldest and most storm-tossed,—had put on a rich mantle of massy foliage, where greens of varying shades rested in the harmony of full, close leafage, one against the other, and every day heralded some wonder, beyond the telling by words, of opening flowers and ripening fruit.

Not one note of all this outer-world gladness escaped Nathan, keeping time, as it did, with the song in his heart. For there was a song there, spite the grave thoughts which belonged to all earnest natures those days, when religion was the famil-

iar topic of conversation, and when it was as impossible to escape its influence as it was to blind eyes to the sunshine. Nevertheless, Nathan delayed his own personal decision of the subject, saying: “Later on, I will decide.” Those were days, also, when the rush and hurry of the present had not disturbed the serene tranquillity of life; for, somehow, men and women then believed the truth—that God never set them a duty without granting the time needful to accomplish it. It was the recognition of this which doubtless influenced Nathan to delay writing Hester the story of his love; for to that, also, he said, “I will wait.” And he counted the days that intervened before the college-term closed, and he would be free to turn homeward, the bringer of his own message rather than the sender of it by the formal use of pen and ink.

Many an hour between the daylight and the dark, as he sailed the blue waters of the bay, he would let his oars lie still, while in anticipation he pictured the hour and the place, where he would tell this story, that is so old, and yet always new; and so real it all became, more than once his strong frame had thrilled with the sense of the touch of Hester’s hand, warm and soft, and nestling into his firm clasp. And imagination is so swift a painter, he followed out the scene in detail, even to the return to the Par-

sonage home, where he saw the minister's familiar study, the shaded lamp and paper-strewn desk, the wide-open Bible, with a vase by its side, holding some woodland flower gathered by Hester. His quickened fancy seemed also to hear her father's word of blessing, uttered with uplifted hand, and head bowed in lowly reverence. He heard, too, the mother's soft sob of mingled joy and wonderment, that her Hester, who only a little while before had been her baby-girl, had been sought and won by plighted troth to this friend of all her life long.— And like a ray of sunshine across this mental picture, was wont to flash the thought of Patty, and her questioning gaze, followed by glee over the ascertained truth that Nathan was to be her elder brother. It was the charm of these musings that made the hours of hard study and close application to lectures and laboratory work, seem as mere play to him. They inspired him, too, with added eagerness of desire to obtain the highest rank for scholarship, awarded on the graduation day. It came at last, and crowned him with the honor he had sought; and not long after noon-time, he stepped down from the platform erected in the central meeting-house of the town, to receive the warm congratulations not only of the College professors, but of friends and classmates. In his hand he held

the roll of parchment that declared him well equipped to enter on his chosen career, the practice of medicine—that blessed healing art, whose motto is, “They serve God best who serve His creatures most.”

It was still early in the day, a good three hours before sundown, and with his natural reserve, Nathan speedily made his way through the group of kindly folk that outside the church were waiting to wish him well, and turning into a narrow street, he was soon at the outskirts of the town, that was then pretty much encircled by the boundary-line of the four squares, that even to this day assert their early claim to importance, by retaining the most valuable land of the now wide, out-spreading city.

He had no mind to slight the College custom of celebrating commencement by an evening reception at the residence of the venerable President. But first he would have an hour or more by himself out on the waters of the harbor, which between three and four o’clock of that July day, lay a calm, unbroken surface, reflecting every boat and white-winged ship that sailed its placid waters, with a distinctness that doubled the object, even to the repeating of mast-head, spar, lines of cordage, and coil of rope. The air was sultry on land, and in the crowded church it had been hot and close, and

this made the life-giving, tarry, sea-weedy odors, specially refreshing to him. With no thought of passing beyond the safe shelter of the bay, he looked half longingly over toward the misty gray line which meant the wide open sea.

Captain Pickett was on the watch for Nathan, and in five minutes the light, well-trimmed craft in which he had spent many an hour during the last months, was gliding over the blue water like a sea-gull. It was a stanch, sea-worthy little boat, light as a canoe, and yet securely riding the waves when the wind blew fresh and stirred their now sleeping forces. The old sea captain had become fond of the youth who many a twilight had lingered to listen with never-failing interest to his tales of storm and shipwreck; and though he was not one to forecast trouble, just as Nathan was pushing off, his keen eye detected a shadowy, vapory cloud, forming across the sky over toward the west. The sight of it caused him to raise a warning finger, as he called out to Nathan to keep a watch to westward, for there was a squall brewing.

Nathan meant to heed the old man's counsel; but his way was outward, and his mind was full of thoughts and hopes wide as the sea; and the calm was unbroken till within an hour of sundown, then he noticed a gentle stirring of the waters, while he

felt the cool sweet touch of a fresh breeze from over inland, but he saw no cloud, though he looked skyward. The haze had spread and thickened, that was all, and so he let the little boat continue to float according to the guidance of wind and tide. It would be time to turn the helm and take the now idle oars in hand, half an hour hence; thus he thought, and then if the wind had freshened into a brisk breeze, he felt no fear. Had not his strong arm rowed in many a boat-race, and encountered many a head-wind and foam-crested wave? and this breeze from the wind-cloud of which Captain Pickett had warned him, why, it was nothing more than a breath from the hills and farm-lands, where his way would lead on the morrow, and where loving eyes would be watching for his coming. He smiled as he thought of the broad fields of corn over which that breeze had played, fluttering their wavy stalks till they were all a-chime with rustling music, and stirring the leaves of a hundred trees at once, and then he looked skyward again to see the haze formed into billowy thunder-clouds, that were lighted up for a brief space with sunset-glory of rosy rays and golden illumining. But even as he looked, the great heaving mass of floating clouds was riven by a flash of lightning, before the lurid red light of which the sunset colors grew dim,

while suddenly he became conscious of a chill, and a darkening of the day. Meanwhile the clouds grew momentarily blacker and heavier, and a soft patter of rain-drops began to stir widening circles on the now restless water which broke into a hundred foam-crested wavelets, as the wind began to freshen and scud across them. It was a wild storm—one of those sudden mid-summer showers that come and go so speedily. And yet, when the clouds broke and the darkness lifted, Nathan saw it was already twilight on land and sea.

During the sudden fury of the gale, his one thought had been to keep the boat before the wind, and she still went dancing across the waves at the rate of many miles an hour. But, as the squall abated, he had time to realize the peril that surrounded him, as in vain he strove to draw in the torn, rent fragment of the sail, that now hung like a rag ; for, as he tried, he found his vaunted strength was as nothing. And then he turned to the oars, in which he had so confidently trusted ; but as they touched the water, a great, rolling wave dashed against the slender blades, snapping them in two. Meanwhile, the little pinnace continued courtesying on its way, keeping time to the rolling waves, one moment sinking into their receding trough, and the next bounding up on some foam-crested billow. All

this time the darkness was deepening, and Nathan knew he had crossed the harbor-bar, powerless to check the light craft, flying before wind and wave like a thistledown blown it knows not where. And still the night darkened, and the great wide sea, the joyous sea of the morning, stretched now an ever-widening gulf between him and his dearest. But Nathan was not afraid; never once did his courage fail him, all through the hours of the night. It was strange, knowing as he did, that humanly, all that was between him and a deep-sea grave was that frail boat. In one sense he did not pray, either, for there was that in his nature which held him back from seeking God in those hours of darkness and sore extremity, when he had closed his heart against the Heavenly Voice in the sunshine. But, while his lips framed no uttered plea for mercy, there was calm in his soul, for he was learning then the wonderful strength there is for weakness, in the knowledge that, even when we dare not ask for ourselves, yet our names are borne up to the Mercy-Seat, buoyed on the wings of prayers offered for us ever since childhood. It was remembering this that led Nathan to repeat the strength-giving promise, "The Everlasting Arms are underneath"; and something in the familiar words wafted him back to the spring-days' ramble among the hills and woods in

search of the first May-flowers of the year. And he thought of Nan, with a pang of regret that he had said no farewell word to her; and, oddly, it was her look, and the tones of her voice, which sounded more vividly to his sharpened imagination and overwrought emotions than even Hester's, and she seemed repeating the question, "What then?" with which she had pressed his playful interpretation of the old legend of Saint Christopher. He could see the very look in her bright eyes, when, as Ruler after Ruler failed, he had asserted, "Strength should master," and he remembered the thrill of pride that beat for a second in his heart as he had stooped and picked up a round stone that lay in the pathway, and sent it whizzing through the air, "high as the sky," as little Patty had shouted.

And now,—his vaunted strength was powerless as a reed bent before the wind. Meanwhile, the waves beat against the fragile boat, every one seeming like an echo of that repeated "What then?" Yes; Nathan Parret learned that hour there was a Power mightier than the strength of his young manhood. But the other Rulers, of which Nan had asked, surely, surely they would prove victorious in life's story, and, even in that time of sore peril, he thought of Love and Knowledge.

These thoughts came trooping through his mind

as rapidly as the clouds went scudding across the star-lighted sky, and, as he thus mused, the short mid-summer night waned, the first early beams of day-dawn began to flush the east. Eagerly he watched for the increasing light, while something in the shadowy gray of clouds above, and sea beneath filled him with a sense of awe. Perchance, too, he realized his position with more of reality when he saw the torn sail and broken oars that had been hidden by the darkness. He had cherished, also, the hope that morning would show the friendly shore of some near coast. But, as the day brightened, he looked in vain eastward and westward, to the north and to the south, scanning the outmost rim of the now clearly-defined meeting-place of sea and sky; but not a rocky cliff or bold promontory reached out a kindly greeting to the sea-compassed youth. Not even a sail did he see till the sun was well up, and then, as he caught a far-off gleam of one, and another gallant ship breasting the waves, he no sooner made some wild effort to call attention to his little boat,—that was like a mere cockle-shell drifting before the wind,—than straightway the vessel's course was changed, and again he was left floating on and on—and so the hours wore away. By noon the strength of morning had gone; he was hungry and thirsty; the rays of the sun beat down

on him in hot and angry beams. What followed, Nathan Parret could never distinctly recall. He was dimly conscious of voices, and a sudden, rushing motion, as though he were being borne through the air—and then all became a blank.

When he woke to consciousness it was night again, but the dash of waves against a vessel's side told him he was no longer out on the open sea, alone in the frail boat, for whose in-coming Captain Pickett and a score of men, classmates and friends, had been watching for twenty-four hours now. He lifted his head, and peered into the gloom, that was only broken by the dim burning of a swinging lamp, and then he stretched forth his hand to feel the heavy folds of a sea-coat that was thrown across him. Overhead, he heard the tramping of feet, and the monotonous drawl of the sailors' "Heave away," as they lowered or raised the sails, according to the wind. And then he slept again—a dreamless sleep, from which he did not wake till mid-day, when the story of his rescue was briefly told.

"It was noontime"—thus the Captain said—"of the day before, when the man at the wheel had caught sight of the little pinnace; and his well-trained eye had discovered in it a prostrate figure, and, with no delay, the long-boat had been lowered by the strong New Bedford men, who had plied

their oars with a steady stroke that speedily bridged the distance, and Nathan, half an hour later, had been lifted by friendly arms to the deck of the whaling vessel, *Mary Ann*, outward bound for a cruise among the northern waters."

This is, in substance, the tale told Nathan; and, after it, the kindly Captain made him welcome to his floating home, though no offer of money or land could win resolute Captain Bates to turn backward, for sentiment was an unknown quality in his composition; and the plea of anxious friends did not stir his resolve, any more than the offer of high compensation had done. And so Nathan Parret found that gold was as powerless as physical strength had been to turn the wheel of existence according to his own desire, and again he remembered Nan's question, "What then?" The Captain had two reasons for his steadfast determination to continue on his voyage. One was, that any hour they might speak some home-bound vessel, to which Nathan could be transferred, and thus be in port well-nigh as speedily as if the *Mary Ann* turned about and set sail backward. The other reason was that, while Captain Bates was a God-fearing man, he had a sailor's superstition; hence he feared returning would involve ill-luck for the resumed voyage.

Meanwhile, the days wore on, and though they

were in the latitude of in-coming and out-going vessels, they did not exchange a signal with any ship that hove to in Nathan's favor. The only explanation of this was that, from the time they neared the 'Banks,' a dense fog had settled down over the sea like a gray veil, and with but brief glimpses of lifting vapor this continued for weeks, during which summer glided into early autumn. But at last there dawned a morning clear as the spring-time Sabbath Nathan remembered so well—and it was a Sunday morning, too.

As soon as Nathan came on deck he lifted the Captain's glass to scan the horizon, and he beheld the wide-spread sails and flying pinions of an approaching vessel, that, a little later, seemed like some huge, white-winged bird poised in mid-air, as it stayed its course in response to his signal, for he had become a master-hand in running up the signs that are the telegraphy of ocean travellers. The vessel proved to be a French packet headed for Havre; a good omen, the sailors declared, since sunny France was his father's birth-land. But Nathan, while all aglow with eagerness over his near release, felt also a dull weight about his heart that he was to continue to go farther away from home and Hester.

And now we will leave him for a while, sailing

eastward—a slow voyage, lengthened by head-winds and frequent storms, but onward, nevertheless. And this supplies us with a parenthesis placed in his history, during which we will retrace our story, and tell what the months so full to him had brought to Victor and Hester, Miss Amanda and Nan Benson.

II.

MISS AMANDA felt no special anxiety when Nathan did not return on the day appointed. Indeed the week ran on, from Wednesday until Saturday, and his not coming was hardly noted. But when Saturday's coach came rumbling into the village, she was so sure he would be among the passengers she went out to the porch, shading her eyes from the level rays of the sun, for it was near the ending of the day,—watching to catch sight of his well-built figure lightly springing to the ground from his favorite seat on the coach-box, by the side of Joe Prindle, the driver, who was called the best whip all that county-side over, and who had been head man on the Union line of stages as long back as Victor and Nathan could remember. But it was not Nathan who alighted. No; it was a tall, scholarly-looking man, unlike the farmers round about, Miss Amanda could plainly see, even at that distance; and a sudden pang of dread foreboding thrilled her heart, like the touch of an ice-cold hand. This very sense of undefined fear gave an added harshness to her always high-pitched voice, as she

turned to Martha, her handmaid, saying: "There's something amiss with the lad, that's my opinion."

"But whatever could happen to Mr. Nathan?" the girl made answer, thinking of his strength of limb, rugged health, and masterful will. This reply only called forth a sharp retort from Miss Amanda.

"Have you no mind," she said, "to remember our Lord's words, 'In the midst of life we are in death'—what, think you, would exempt Nathan Parret from that saying, I would like to know?" And not waiting for an answer, she turned hastily away, re-entering the house, and busying herself in some last preparations for the Sabbath, which sun-down would so soon usher in.

This striving to hide natural anxiety by assumed indifference is a habit some people have, and unless we know the bygone circumstances that have led to it, we had better be tender and gentle in our judgments, for the sudden lifting of a veil might show us that which would explain much that, in our ignorance, we call hardness and lack of feeling.

And of very few lives is this more true than of Miss Amanda Barstow's. Other eyes than hers were on the lookout for Nathan—Hester and Patty went as far as the garden-gate, and Nan Benson was standing by the turn in the road, as the coach

rolled by; Victor, too, had loitered down the long, shady street half an hour before, and was waiting on the steps of the village inn as the stage drove up.

The gentleman whom Miss Amanda had regarded as a stranger, he at once recognized as Professor Raymond, a College officer who had shown marked interest in the Parret brothers. With his wonted ease Victor stepped forth to meet the new-comer, whose grave countenance told a story of sorrow, even before he grasped Victor's outstretched hand. Together they entered the inn, the Professor pausing to close the door of the sitting-room, which Mrs. Mills, the thrifty hostess, had thrown wide open, her power of quick observation at once detecting that the stranger brought tidings of ill-omen.

The interview was not long, for there was so little to tell. Nothing more than the story of a pleasure-boat sailing away in the sunshine, which was followed by a sudden darkening of the heavens, black, ragged clouds hiding the blue sky, while the water took on a sullen, gray hue, across which an occasional white-cap had glimmered like a flash of light against the dark background. And then the dull moaning of the rising wind had been followed by a wild sweep of a gale, a down-pour of blinding rain, broken by darting flashes of lurid lightning, and sharp, crashing peals of thunder.

This was the Professor's story, as, half an hour later, he repeated it to the trembling group of listeners suddenly assembled in the north parlor of Parret House. Mr. and Mrs. Gaylord were there, Hester and little Patty, Victor, Judge Benson and Nan, the farm-hands too, and the doctor; for the news that trouble had come to the Parrets had flown from one end to the other of the village street in less time than it takes to tell.

Spite this assembled company, it was to Miss Amanda Professor Raymond addressed his tale, concluding it by a brief account of the night-long watch kept by Captain Pickett, and Nathan's friends, for some sight of the little boat, which never came to shore; and then he told of the two-days' search along the coast, on both sides of the harbor;—a search unsuccessful up to the time of his starting that day, at peep of dawn, to bring news of the sad occurrence to the friends who loved Nathan best.

There was no dwelling on details, these bare facts were all, and as Professor Raymond said, "Each one must follow the verdict of their own judgment in deciding the probable fate of the brave youth." And then in glowing terms he had dwelt on the honors that had crowned Nathan's scholarship that graduation day, saying as he ended, "And with

such high aims and prospects before him, the lad never went down without a manful struggle for life." By these last words the Professor showed that he ranked among those who regarded Nathan's fate as settled without so much as a ray of hope.

In fact Mrs. Gaylord and Nan Benson were the only two who resolutely refused to accept as final the universal opinion, that Nathan had found a grave beneath the sea waves. Mrs. Gaylord's plea for refusing to believe this, was founded on her claim to superior knowledge of seafaring life, which as a captain's daughter, supplied her with a never-failing series of wonderful rescues, as she recalled how one and another had been cast on lonely, seldom-frequented islands, off the out-lying coast, or picked up by some friendly craft bound for a distant port. It was by these tales she soothed sobbing little Patty, and Nan too; for, as she listened, Nan clung to them as though in very truth they were anchors of hope. No one else heeded Mrs. Gaylord's words, save by a kindly "It is possible," straightway followed by the unlikelihood of a slight boat like that in which Nathan had set sail weathering a gale that had driven ashore more than one stout schooner, and a score of fishing-smacks.

As for Nan, her persistent refusal to relinquish hope was called "mere obstinacy." Nevertheless,

she did have hopes, and she kept them; though, as the weeks counted months and no tidings came, she seldom gave them utterance; while, night after night, she lay with wide-open eyes, her heart repeating: "He will come; I know he will come."

Sorrow always tells its story differently to every soul into which it enters; and when, half an hour after Professor Raymond's tale, the group of mourners—who had knelt in prayer, led by Mr. Gaylord,—rose from their knees, each countenance bore token of a dissimilar experience, either of submission or rebellion. And as time went on, the outward manifestation of their grief continued unlike. For sorrows are classified much after the definition given by Judge Benson's old cook, Dinah, who asserted: "Thar be dem jes takes on drefful, a-weepin' an' a-wailin', an' dem dar be de bery ones dat slips out from dar woes, like de critturs wit' de huffs slips de halter;—an' dar be dem dat's still-like, an' dar be de ones dats a-feelin' an' a-feelin', till, Lor' bress ye, childe," she said, looking down at Nan, "dar a'n't so mich as a pin's p'int lef' in dem dar hearts free from da ache; an' dem dar, da be de ones dat do ebryt'ing jis still-like, da keeps on a-smilin'—how-someber da des dat, ole Dinah neber could makes out, nohow,—but dat da be de ones dat feels de

most an' de longest, neber fails, do da makes no
pe'tickler show ob dar feelin'."

Certainly, Dinah was right in regard to the grief felt over Nathan's supposed loss, for it was true enough—those who took it the most quietly were the ones in whose hearts it found an abiding-place; and they were Miss Amanda, and, little as the world thought it, Nan Benson.

Hester, at first, was utterly prostrated by the news, and when, at the end of a month, she began to rally, and resumed her wonted occupations, there was for a time a pensive sadness in her look and manner that seemed like the shadowy mist of an August morning. But when October came, the sadness, like the mist, had lifted and gone, and in its place there had come a sudden radiance, like the encompassing of rosy light contrasted with the recent shadows.

Do not call sweet Hester heartless, because of this. It was not that she forgot; that could not be, when her love for Nathan was the sincere love of a sister for a dear brother, for whom she still mourned, though with grief assuaged; but she was living those days in the dream-like gladness of Victor's frequent companionship and openly-declared affection; in response to which she had promised to wed him when the spring came again. For his whispered declaration of love had, with no delay,

broken down the hedge of reserve with which Hester had guarded her heart, even from herself. It was a quiet happiness she felt, and not altogether unshadowed; for, being profoundly true, the remembrance that Nathan had misunderstood her caused a pang of regret, almost as though she had been really guilty of wilful deceit, and she now, from her own love for Victor, so well knew what, for a time, she had only surmised. She told Victor her regret over that thoughtless hand-clasp, and he strove to comfort her by tender words, and the sad fact—as they both believed—that it made little difference, since Nathan had passed beyond the need of mortal love. In reply, Hester had softly whispered: “And perhaps he knows all about it now, and then he knows I did not mean to deceive.” And yet, it was the night after this conversation that she dreamed again that Nathan called her, and, as she replied, Victor called too, and his voice seemed to hush the sound of her answer.

To Victor, Nathan’s supposed loss was a great shock, and during the summer days that followed the sad news, the better part of his nature was in the ascendency. This served to deepen Mr. and Mrs. Gaylord’s, as well as Hester’s, blindness to his real weakness of principle, and light esteem for the subjects most sacred and dear to them.

And so it happened the parents consented to Hester's engagement, while she gave him the very best of all she had—her sweet, pure, and true woman's heart.

But if the trial of Nathan's loss became less keen, with every passing week, to Hester and to his brother, time only served to deepen Miss Amanda's grief. Not that she made any special show of it, for she went about her daily tasks with even more of energetic foresight, and enforcement of duty among the men and maids employed on the farm and in the dairy. She assumed, also, a manner sterner than her wont, while, at the same time, she daily grew more tender to everything that could suffer, from a human heart to the least of the dumb creatures, around which centre so many of the interests and cares of life to farmer-folk. She remembered, too, to scatter once or twice a week a handful of crumbs on the ledge of the window-sill in Nathan's little room,—“that,” as she said to herself, “the birds might find a meal ready for their seeking.” This had been a boyish custom of Nathan's, and often sternly rebuked by the thrifty house-keeper; and yet, now, she never scattered those crumbs without turning from the window with a dimness in her eyes.

The effect of sorrow on Nan Benson was still

different—she never shed a tear, in public. Her manner, too, was much the same, and her words still bright, sparkling, and positive, and yet there was an indescribable change. She had a strong nature, and she suffered proportionately. She was brave too, and she made no effort to run away from her sorrow, though she tried to conceal it from all eyes, save the One of All Pity; for it was in God's sight she summoned up her courage to meet it. And it was thus she gained strength to encounter the every-day duties of life with cheerfulness. Not that Nan made quick progress in learning patience and submission; she was too impulsive and eager-tempered for that, yet the discipline of sorrow was bringing out the earnest side of her character, and she daily developed more of helpfulness toward others, and less thought for herself.

Though Hester Gaylord had always been something sweet as a poem to Miss Amanda, and she had been in the habit of calling Nan "a light-hearted, giddy young creature," there was a decided reversal in her feelings those weeks; for, with no word spoken, this stiff, angular New England spinster read the girl's story as plainly as though it had been traced on a printed page, and, somehow, Nan knew this; for love is quick of insight,

and she recognized that no one—save herself—mourned for Nathan as Miss Amanda did. Thus these two women—the one in the autumn, the other in the spring-time of life—came close together; and yet Miss Amanda Barstow did not open the long-shut door of her heart, to let the young girl look within, and catch a glimpse of a grave hidden there for years and years. No! there was no outward show of sentiment between the two; it was simply that the tangled, broken threads left out in the weaving of her own life's pattern made the older woman understand there were, also, stitches dropped in the younger woman's, and Nan—it was all plain to her.

Meanwhile, those tangled threads and dropped stitches, in both hearts, were waiting for the last great weaving, when the pattern we call imperfect, the threads we call twisted and tangled, and the dropped stitches, will be gathered up and smoothed out by Him of the Seamless Robe. And then—think of the rounded soul, that will look out no longer from a fragmentary, broken life, but from one in which the mortal shall have put on immortality. Think of it!—and—“these are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb, *therefore* are they before the throne of God, and

serve Him day and night.” Meanwhile, “Blessed are they that are Homesick, for they shall come at last to the Father’s House.”

“Our Father’s House, I know, is broad and grand;
In it how many, many mansions are!”

III.

IT was autumn when Nathan bade farewell to the Captain and crew of the whaling vessel, the *Mary Ann* of New Bedford; and the weeks which followed before land was at last sighted held for him an entirely new experience. One thing only remained unchanged, and that was the wide stretch of surrounding water, with the over-arching sky above.

The Captain of the French ship proved to be a courtly gentleman, and Nathan's story at once called forth the inborn chivalry and romance of his French nature. He was quick, also, to appreciate the youth's eagerness to let those at home know of his safety, as well as his restless desire to hear from them, and he felt a kindly sympathy for the impatience over the long delay, which sometimes gained mastery over Nathan's usual self-control, becoming a longing so intense that he was well-nigh wild with homesickness. Captain Girard skilfully met these moods by urging the preparation of letters that could be despatched homeward with the good tidings, immediately after arrival at Havre;

at the same time, he encouraged Nathan to hope that they would pass some outward-bound ship of the line, to which he promised at once to transfer him. But this did not occur, and, as they neared port, Nathan daily became more perplexed in anticipation of arriving a stranger in a strange land, without money or friends. For the Parret family were residents of Southern France, and thus, for immediate aid, beyond his reach. This trouble Captain Gerard met by assurances of prompt assistance from the American Consul, as soon as Nathan's story was made known. The only difficulty, as he said, would be his detention in France till replies and moneys were received in response to the letters sent home. This proved to be the case, and it involved a stay reaching on till spring, and long after; but that Nathan did not know, till those letters came. His perplexities allayed, Nathan's heart beat high with joy on the morning when he awoke to find himself within sight of his father's birth-land, *la belle France*. Till toward mid-day, the ship coasted near shore, but at noon-time the city of Havre appeared, and an hour later the vessel was at safe anchorage.

Only those who have gone through some such experience as Nathan's, can picture the gladness of once again setting foot on dry land. And every-

thing in the, to him, strange new world of the foreign city, seemed to bid him welcome. He smiled to find the earth so beautiful and glad a place. The weather was fair and sunshiny; the streets full of well-dressed, light-hearted people, all intent on celebrating a *fête-day*, and all smiling and chattering, with the complete abandonment to pleasure which is wont to mark a Frenchman's holiday. Music and flowers were at every corner; and after Nathan left the crowded wharf, and, accompanied by Captain Gerard, climbed the hill on which the handsome part of the town is built, and where the American Consul resided, it seemed to him no city could be more beautiful, and that flowers made every courtyard a garden of brightness. The fantastically-trimmed trees, and the style of architecture, so unlike that of his native land, gave a charm, also, to the least detail of his surroundings. But, without telling of the weeks which followed, we will speed on to Nathan's arrival at the home from which his father had gone forth, an exile, so many years before.

It was the mystic hour between daylight and dark, when he alighted from the diligence in which the latter part of his journey had been accomplished; and as he approached the entrance to the old Chateau, for a moment seen in the dim light,

all was so like the southern entrance to Parret House he felt, almost, as though he were home again, and as though kind Miss Amanda would be the first to greet him when the closed door opened. But this feeling was only for a moment; the next second, he realized the New England homestead, even with its "Chateau-side," was a miniature building compared with the imposing edifice before which he now stood, and whose present occupant was a distant cousin of his father's.

Nathan had written this M. le Conte of his stress, and in reply had received a stately summons to the ancestral home. Victor, too, had described his brief stay with M. le Conte when in France, so that Nathan was in some measure prepared for the formal, yet courteous greeting that awaited him. But it was a keen disappointment to find his aged cousin infirm, and so far weakened in mind, that his memories of Nathan's father were dim and unsatisfactory; while Madame, though younger, was a second wife, and knew but little of the branch of the Parret family from which Nathan traced descent. But she was a bright, warm-hearted little lady, and what she lacked in knowledge of the Parret family she made up by her hospitable greeting and cordial good-will, which bade Nathan regard the Chateau as home for as long a time as he could remain con-

tent with the quiet ways of an aged relative like M. le Conte, and "a lady old as herself,"—as brisk little Madame enjoyed repeating. And she did seem old to Nathan, for youth is apt to measure age from its own stand-point, and we all know a year at twenty counts for double the same length of time at forty—what then must it be at sixty, and on? a mere hand's-breadth, I think. But if old, according to time's record, Madame Parret was a child in her youngness of soul. For she had a happy, sweet nature, and a bright way of seeing the cheerful side, even of shadowed hours. Hence, she was one of those for whom there is no such thing as "old age." In appearance, she was like some quaint figure belonging to a courtly scene. She was petite, and quick and brisk in movement, with a pronounced step, unlike the languid grace of the present day, or the, at that time, stately repose of a high-born English dame; for this little French Madame put down her slender feet, encased in high-heeled satin slippers, with a distinct pat-a-pat that resounded on the uncarpeted floors of the *salon* and wide halls of the Chateau.

As for the little lady's face, it bore evidence of her social rank, as well as told of fineness of character. Her eyebrows were delicately traced, as though pencilled, and she had a way of raising them

which served to point an interrogation, or express surprise, either of pleasure or disapproval, which was quite as effective as uttered words. The eyes beneath those arched brows were gray, and kindly—keen-sighted, too, even in age. A small, aquiline nose added to the general delicacy of her countenance, spite the dark complexion which told of life-long exposure to Southern sunshine. Her lips were thin, with a firmness about the lines of the mouth which indicated that she was one accustomed to rule. In dress, she manifested the dainty taste of a true Frenchwoman, and, withal, she was so sprightly and animated Nathan never wearied of her society during the months of his stay at the Chateau; for, with every new day, her conversation seemed to him like some fresh page of a story of unfailing interest.

Thus it happened, that many of the hours feeble M. le Conte spent sleeping peacefully in his high-backed easy-chair, Madame filled for Nathan with tales of her youth, and stories and legends that were woven of fact and fiction, poetry and prose. And often, in imagination, they were both wafted far away from their present surroundings to some bygone time and scene—one hour enjoying the society of the Paris *salons*, the next entering into the wild turmoil and strife of battle; or, perchance,

Madame's tale would be of quiet cloister and saintly hermit, or of gay troubadours and wayside singers from the sunny plains of Tuscany.

Thus entertained, the season of Nathan's waiting for tidings from home went by quickly, while it was a pleasant time; for, added to Madame's even-tide reminiscences, there were the long days during which he had nothing to do but enjoy the beauty of Nature, or the companionship of books. And, while an earnest soul like his could not lose the impression of the Unseen and Beyond to which he had been brought so near that night of the storm, this did not prevent the latent joyfulness of his temperament from shining out those weeks, like hidden-away sunshine that had till then been held half in check, partly by the rugged New England climate, and partly by the grave seriousness of the people among whom he had lived; in part, too, by his own nature; for it was one of the contradictions in Nathan's character that, while he possessed light-heartedness, it was always blended with seriousness, and he was never gay, like Victor, for his enjoyment was always quiet and restrained, even when at its height, as it was during that time, when every day opened for him a new page of Nature's full book of fresh delights, beginning with his first look in the morning, and not ending till his last at night.

From the windows of his room, he had a wide view of hill-slopes clothed in the green of olives and dusky pines, while, beyond, mountains lifted high their peaks towering skyward, and here and there broken by the dazzling white of some snow-capped summit. The nearer prospect was the hillside vineyard, with a glimpse into the valley at its base, sunny and green at that season of the year, with golden lights flitting among the olive-trees, and casting clearly-defined blue shadows across the closely-mown grass. But it was in wandering among the hills that Nathan found the wider out-looks, that so often he recalled in after-days; and there were hills and hills to wander among, so thickly were they clustered around the old Chateau. From one special hill that he climbed more than once, he could see the country spread out like a map before him—on one side bounded by a mountain range, cloven here and there by precipitous ravines, where mysterious shadows lurked even at mid-day; the entire landscape being wild, solemn, and solitary, and in sharp contrast to the view he caught by merely turning from one point of the compass to the other. For then his gaze extended over a wide valley, through which a river wound its way, gleaming in the sunshine like a silvery ribbon drawn across green fields, while here and there faint, hazy

lines of smoke curled skyward from some lonely chateau, convent, or remote village. Far away in the distance he could trace, also, a shadowy blue line, like a patch of sky dropped earthward, and he knew that bit of blue meant the waters of the Mediterranean. But deeper in interest than glimpses of far-away sea, mountain, or plain, were the sights of the village through which Nathan passed on his way to and from the wooded hills. It was divided by a narrow street, roughly paved with uneven stones, over which diligence, and charette, and heavily-laden wains rumbled, waking echoing sounds, that blended with the tinkling bells on the horses' necks; the song of the nightingales; and voices of the peasants calling to one another, or singing some wild tune that caught a softened note as it mingled with the sound of the convent bell, that came floating down from the high cliff of the near mountain-side, on whose breezy height it was perched, like an eagle's nest. There were also the dark-eyed peasant women for Nathan to gaze and wonder at, as on their well-poised heads they dexterously balanced earthen jugs, filled to the very brim; or baskets laden with snowy linen, pure and white, from the bleaching-fields over by the brook-side. These were but few of the sights and sounds which made the busy life of that little village of

Southern France more interesting to him than the grand scenery Nature spread so bountifully on every side.

It was a simple life he led, free from all disturbing influences; and afterward, when he remembered that time, it stood out like a fresh, green oasis in the midst of a wide stretch of desert sand. Meanwhile, the western winds that were swelling the buds on the orange and lemon-trees, and waking up the flowers on hill-sides and in valleys, were bringing nearer that white-winged ship bearing across the wide Atlantic the replies to his home-sent letters;—replies that were to darken the sky for Nathan with a darkness as much deeper than the sudden overcasting of cloud and storm the July afternoon that had floated him out seaward, as midnight is darker than twilight. But no forecasting shadow of the nearing storm warned him of this, and never had his thoughts of Hester Gaylord been dearer and more full of hope than they were then, as he found, when he told Madame Parret of her, and of his far-away home.

A tender intimacy had sprung up between Madame and Nathan, hence she listened to his words with a warmth of interest that stirred her own heart with a pulse-beat of memory that dated back to a year when she, too, had known the spring-time of

love. Nathan's voice had vibrated with feeling as he pictured Hester, the Puritan maiden, stately and calm as a white lily, with a countenance sweet and holy as the face of the gentle Mary that hung above the altar in the parish church; and his heart was full of gladness, so near seemed the beautiful future, which was only a vision, but, later on, to become a blessed reality. "Yes, surely a reality," he whispered to himself; while, as Madame hearkened to his uttered words, she smiled, and thought, and sighed—for, somehow, aging people are wont to blend a sigh with a smile, as they listen to the dreams of youth.

When Nathan came to the end of his tale, with the rare tact this old French lady possessed, by inheritance as well as culture, she gracefully caught the thread that hangs like a dropped stitch from every story which, in its telling, has deeply moved the heart, and which snaps and breaks, unless the one who has occupied the place of listener tenderly takes it up, and weaves it in with some recountal of an interest of their own, and thus knots fast the bond of mutual confidence given and received. It is after such interweaving that friendship blossoms into a wide-open flower, that never fades. For true friendship *is* fadeless, it being a plant that up-springs in human hearts from seeds of the "Tree,

every leaf of which is for the healing of the nations," for its root is Love.

Madame's story was only a bit out of her own life,—a mere scrap—but it was enough. As she concluded it, M. le Conte stirred, and then awoke from his after-dinner nap, coming back to consciousness with more of intelligence than he had shown at any time since Nathan's arrival. Perchance the reason may have been that even his dulled senses caught the rustling of angels' wings hovering near. For the angels had been very near, as Madame and Nathan had opened wide the doors of the inner sanctuary of their hearts; for, surely, angels are the bringers of holy thoughts, pure love, and earnest desire after the best and truest things that earth gives in anticipation of Heaven; and of such things they had spoken.

It was that hour, just before the good-nights were said, that Madame told Nathan that on the morrow a new interest was to enter the old Chateau, for M. le Conte's widowed sister, Madame Valais, and her daughter Victorine, were to come from Paris, to meet the early spring, there, in the heart of the southern country. Victorine was called for the same forefather in whose honor Victor had been named, and Victor had met this young French cousin—thus Madame said—on his last year's visit to the

Chateau. And she added: "Of your brother you will speak, and speaking of the absent, bridges dividing miles, for words of affection are like a fairy chain, spanning time and distance."

But, alas! there are words and words; and some widen the dividing space, rather than narrow it!

IV.

MADAME VALAIS and Victorine arrived at the appointed hour, and when, toward sun-down, Nathan returned from a long ramble among the wooded heights overhanging the village, his first sight of the Chateau announced the event, by the mute sign of open doors and wide-flung jalousies. As he crossed the courtyard, he became conscious, also, of a stir in the quiet wont to reign over the place.

An hour later, on entering the *salon*, he became even more keenly aware of the change the arrival of the ladies had already effected. It was the first time he had seen Madame Parret in full evening dress, and for a moment he half failed to recognize his old friend in the gaily-attired little lady, who, by an imperious wave of her fan, bade him approach, as she presented him to the new-comers. He missed the familiar sight of her glossy black-satin gown, the sombreness of which had been rarely relieved by so much as a gay ribbon, a flower fresh from the garden being Madame's favorite ornamentation. But this simplicity seemed now a

thing of the past. For Madame Valais, too, was dressed after the most recent fashion of the French Court, wearing a skirt of crimson velvet, looped back from a petticoat of brocaded satin of a darker shade, while the bodice of her gown consisted of a gauzy mass of the figured blonde lace then in vogue.

To Nathan, used as he was to the studied plainness of the New England matrons and maidens, these gay costumes were distasteful; at the same time he regarded them with a certain interest, much like that with which he often lingered to gaze on the quaint portraits that lined the walls of the central hall of the Chateau. And, in fact, the ladies seemed to him like the courtly dames represented in those old-time pictures, suddenly vivified into life and motion.

It was with a sense of relief he turned to the young girl standing within the shadow of the high, carved mantel-shelf—a relief blended with pleasure, for Victorine Valais was an unusually attractive type of a French girl; her charm consisting chiefly in an undefined grace that pervaded her personality, and in a constantly-varying expression of countenance which caught the imagination.

But trying to picture her by words is much like trying to cage, in set, formal phrase, the song of birds, now loud and joyous, and then soft and low;

or the color of flowers when violets, roses, and scarlet poppies grow side by side ; for she was a creature of moods and tempers as various as these differing types, combining, as she did, the versatile temperament and light-heartedness of her race with an undertone plaintiveness. She was entirely natural, and free from constraint, in her intercourse with Nathan ; and before the month ended they were more like brother and sister than distant cousins, in their enjoyment of the opening spring unfolding around them with the rapidity which only belongs to the south ; and which was to Nathan a perpetual wonder and delight, contrasted with New England's slow opening of leaf and flower, and blighting chill of frost, with snowfalls even late as March and April. Verily, remembering this, it was no wonder his native land seemed all unlike that sunny corner of France, where sometimes flowers, trees, and shrubs budded and blossomed between the dawning and the ending of one brief day. For often, going out in the early morning, Nathan passed magnolia-trees, misty with their weight of unopened buds, and returning at nightfall, the very same trees were laden with a wealth and beauty of blooming flowers ; while the fields, green at sunrise, by noon-time were blue with the blossoms of the grape hyacinth ; and straggling branches of climbing rose-bushes had sudden-

ly bloomed into pink, yellow, and white loveliness. As for anemones, narcissuses, white and blue irises, and violets,—sweet as miniature globes of fragrance,—they were scattered on every side as thickly as though all the land were a garden of wild-flowers.

This was Nathan's impression of spring in France, when the season was only late February, a month when memory told him at home the snow lay drifted high round Parret House, while the flowers were still fast asleep under the warm mantle of winter's white snow-robe of charity. The waters of the rippling brooklet he knew, too, were hushed by their icy covering, while over the creeks, lakes, and rivers, there stretched a wide expanse of frozen water, solid as rock and clear as crystal.

But Nathan's thoughts found many other subjects to ponder those days, beside the unlike climate of his own land and his father's. Looking back on that time, years afterward, he often wondered at the entire freedom with which Madame Valais left Victorine at liberty to follow the dictates of her own will—a will which led the young girl to spend many of those sunshiny hours in reading or talking with Nathan, as together they sauntered to and fro through the broad avenues, or wandered into the orange-grove, and sometimes beyond, far even as to the vineyard hill-slope. The explanation of

Madame Valais' release of Victorine from restraint arose from the fact that she had decided that, in the festival month of May, her daughter's long-contemplated marriage to a French officer should take place; and hence she left her free to enjoy those last months of her girlhood, and having told Nathan of Victorine's betrothal, she felt no anxiety on his account; she also told him her conversation was a repetition of one she had had with Victor on the same subject, during his visit to the Chateau.

As Madame made this statement, Victorine stood by her garden-chair, idly pulling the leaves from a yellow rose, and at her mother's words, the young girl's eyes had darkened and flashed, as though with sudden anger; and yet, the next minute she had sped across the open courtyard, in as gay and eager pursuit of a bright-winged butterfly as if she were a child like Patty Gaylord. Later, when conversing with Nathan, Madame Parret referred to Victorine's bright prospects, saying, her future husband was a man well on in life, who would be like a father to the young girl. And with an approving smile, the little French lady had lifted her arched brows in token that it was a matter for general congratulation.

But what did Victorine think? This was a question Nathan pondered more than once, as he noted

her changing moods—one minute gay, the next grave. At last he came to know, for she was not one to withhold confidence from a sympathetic and interested listener.

It was early March when she told him; by every in-coming mail, now, he was looking to receive the long-expected replies to his home letters. Victorine knew this, and she knew, too, his only regret at leaving France would be the parting from Madame. But she did not know that he combined this regret with glad anticipations for a speedy return with his hoped-for bride, Hester Gaylord, whose welcome by Madame he had more than once pictured. But as he wove bright fancies of that time, he never walked through the olive-woods, for there was something in the subdued green of their heavy foliage that cast a shadow over him. Perhaps—though he did not define it—the emotions came from his knowledge that not yet had he taken one upward step toward the ascent of the spiritual Mount of Olives, the way walked by those who have humbly submitted self-will to God's will.

Yet it was in the shade of the olive-trees he and Victorine were sauntering, when she told him her story. The first part he had heard from Madame Parret, but the end was entirely unexpected. Victorine began by a graceful, picturesque recountal of

Victor's visit to the Chateau the year before, and she ended it by saying: "I was very happy, very gay then; life, like the sky, was all sunshine." And she trembled like a rose-tree blown by the wind, while tears fell from her bright eyes, like dew-drops from the rose's heart when the breeze stirs its tender leaves.

But as this is not the story of Victorine Valais, enough for us to know the simple facts, so far as they touch Nathan Parret. And they were that Victor, for the sake of passing pleasure, and to enliven a dull visit at the old Chateau, had won the young girl's love as carelessly as he gathered a flower to wear in his buttonhole. And then, merely because he enjoyed the excitement,—with no thought of what it might cost Victorine,—he had, on leaving France, opened a correspondence with her, that involved intrigue and concealment on her part.

As she told this, she seemed to Nathan as dull and senseless as a stone in the roadway to the deceit she had practiced, and he turned from her in hot anger; the knowledge, also, that his own brother should have thus trifled with the girl's heart, hurt him keenly as a blow. But after a moment he remembered, in the fact that Victor was his brother lay Victorine's claim to his counsel, and

so he could not refuse it ; he was influenced, too, by a certain sway which Victor always exercised over him. It came from two causes—one, the being true himself, he was not suspicious ; the other, that he was always more eager to find excuse than to find fault with Victor, for he saw all the good there was in him ; it being a fact that, in our thoughts of those dear to us, we lift or lower them, according to our own level.

As for Nathan's advice to Victorine, it was summed up in the immediate duty of telling her mother the childish scheme she had woven to escape marriage in May—a foolish plan, to which Victor had lightly replied by the promise of a letter of details later on, which of course never came—Victorine's idea having been that he would re-cross the Atlantic, and then a hasty wedding, to be followed by flight to America and the New England homestead.

It was singular that, as Nathan listened to Victorine's words, Hester's truthful soul came to his memory as vividly as if he had been looking on a picture in which it was contrasted with Victorine's lack of truthfulness in principle ; and he never forgot the thankfulness with which that memory thrilled his heart, and which did not fail him even amid the dark hours that so speedily followed.

For as he and Victorine passed out from the shadows of the olive-trees, sorrow met him, and yet it was heralded, and welcomed as a longed-for joy. Madame Parret was the bringer of the news. She approached with a brisk step, waving gaily a white package, that Nathan straightway knew to be the home letters, come at last! With her pretty French way of encompassing every event, however slight, with a bit of poetry, Madame, just before she handed them to him, gathered a long tendril from a climbing rose that clung for support around a solitary olive that grew by the roadside, and playfully she twined the flowery garland, in all its pink beauty, about the package, saying, "An omen of good, flowers from home!"

To the last day of his life, Nathan, after that hour, could never see a cluster of Provence roses without seeing also, the look of dismay on kindly Madame's face as, in his haste to take the letters, he grasped with them, not only the roses, but a thorn, that tore deep across the open palm of his hand.

V.

THOUGH Nathan had been so eager to hold in his very own grasp the precious words from home, all a New Englander's reserve restrained him from breaking so much as one seal till he was alone in his own room. And that was not for full two hours, as the formal dinner intervened. When at last the coveted seclusion came, he still hesitated, as one is so apt to do in moments of deep emotion. He even spread the half-dozen white missives out before him on the table, and studied the familiar writing on each, as though in some mystic fashion the hearts of the dear writers smiled at him from the pen and ink superscriptions.

Six letters ! And all traced by different hands, all outcomes from different hearts, no wonder they were a study ! Largest of all was the one addressed in Miss Amanda's straight-up-and-down writing. Next came a goodly-sized missive, bearing the sign of Mr. Gaylord's scholarly penmanship. Next a document from Judge Benson. Then came Victor's letter, and close beside it a dainty epistle from Hester, with something of grace even in its

folding and address. The last was hardly more than a note, from Nan Benson. Looking at them, lying side by side, making a white island on the scarlet and gold of the heavily embroidered table-cover, again Nathan followed a contradictory impulse, and opened the one he least cared for first, and that was Judge Benson's, which contained kindly congratulations over his safety, followed by business details, and enclosures necessary to refund the moneys advanced him, as well as to defray the expense of his return home. After scanning the chief items of the Judge's letter, Nathan broke the seal of Mr. Gaylord's. And though he was not given to outward show of emotion, tears filled his eyes as he read the good minister's strong words of heartfelt joy over his safety, and earnest pleading that this experience might lead him to a full and entire consecration of his soul to the service of the Lord, who had so protected him amid the perils of stormy wind and wrecking wave.

“Without this consecration,” Mr. Gaylord wrote, “you will be as a leaf blown by the wind, ever restless from the never-ceasing conflict of conscience with self-will—you will constantly encounter also responsibilities beyond your own unaided resources.” It was thus, by the coming of this letter just when it did, that the second time when Nathan

Parret stood on the threshold of a new life, he was met by our Lord's call, bidding him walk a path of peace, even though his way lead through a desert of disappointment. I use the words 'a new life,' in the sense that no life can be the same, after intense experiences of either profound joy or sorrow.

But, as at the first call, so now again at the second, Nathan did not accept the peace offered, for not yet was he willing to relinquish his pride of self-power and self-will. Not yet had he tested and found empty of the 'highest good,' service under the different Rulers, whom he had told Nan he would try, if one and then another failed him. And yet, that very hour, he would fain have crept somewhere and hid himself like a weary child in a mother's arms.

Mr. Gaylord's letter had ended with the hope that Nathan would be home in time for the day that, now that mourning for him had given place to thanksgiving, was looked forward to as a season of unmarred joy. But the words, as he read them, conveyed no special meaning to Nathan; neither did Mrs. Gaylord's motherly postscript, nor Patty's. He only smiled at the child's loyal way of expressing her affection in the message printed beneath her mother's. It read: "Dear Nathan, I ask God to bring you home safe, and I thank Him for

keeping you alive. And I love you always, as my best brother." Strange words for the child to use, trained, as she was, in a home where partiality was something unknown; but then Patty, Nathan remembered, had always been a child of surprises.

Next, he opened Miss Amanda's letter, which was so like herself, full of suppressed tenderness and joy that "her boy," as she called him, was safe and coming home; and yet, blended in with this gladness, were reproofs for his lack of watchfulness of the sky that July day. Miss Amanda's language, too, was formal, after the fashion of New England people; and if warm-hearted and warm-spoken Madame Parret had read those pages, truly she would have thought the American spinster of as chilly a nature as the climate of her native land was chilly and cold. But Nathan knew better; he could read between the lines, and the love that spoke there was warm and tender as a caress.

It was not till near the end of her letter that Miss Amanda mentioned Hester, and then merely by a word, in which Nathan heard no warning note; though afterward, he recalled the lines, and understood their import, for Miss Amanda dwelt on the changes the spring would bring, with its unlooked-for event; in the same connection referring to the struggle it had cost her to submit to the Lord's

will, when she thought Nathan had found a watery grave ; adding, “ Remember, Nathan, the lesson I then learned was that the sooner, in all trials, one yields their will to the Lord’s, the sooner comes peace ; for, without submission, one’s heart is little better than a wrecked ship, or a drift of tangled sea-weed.”

When at last he came to the end of Miss Amanda’s long epistle, he broke the seal of Nan’s brief note, which contained not a word about herself, though every letter shone like a diamond-point of brightness, reflecting gladness over his safety ;—of Hester, Nan wrote : “ She was like a broken lily when first the woful tidings came, for Hester loves you, as if you were in very truth her brother ; always remember this, dear Nathan.” At these words, for the first time since he began to read the home-letters, the shadow of a frown darkened Nathan’s brow ; but, later on, he thanked Nan for their tenderness, just as he did for the half-page which read : “ How hard it is to keep in mind, when it is night with us, that the daylight brightness is on the other side, and the world goes round ;—never came a night yet that was so long but that, at last, the morning dawned ! ”

Victor’s letter, now ; and as Nathan read it—as he had done while reading the others—he held Hes-

ter's in the firm clasp of his strong right hand, for, in his sureness of her love, there was a certain pleasure to him in thus keeping her words, as he would have kept some holy thing, for perusal when others of lesser value were put on one side. But that joyful reading, so surely anticipated, was not to be; for Victor's letter brought the pang—after which, like some bird hurt at the moment of swiftest flight, joy lay a wounded thing in Nathan Parret's heart for many a long year.

Victor's preface was a page of congratulations, and plans for Nathan's return home—and then, with no word of preparation, came the sentence, "for home you must be in time for my wedding-day, May 19th.—Was ever bride so fair, think you, as mine, sweet Hester Gaylord, will be?" Hester Gaylord! The words seemed to Nathan written in fire—but there are hours in every life which cannot be told of, and those which followed were such hours to Nathan Parret. During them he never once loosened his hold of Hester's note, while over and over he murmured, in his grief: "Hester, my stolen treasure! cruel destiny, that has robbed me of my darling! My treasure is stolen from me—stolen by my own brother!"

And so the hours wore on; it was not till the flickering light of the lamp began to grow pale and

sickly before the brighter shining of a new day, that he realized the night had come and gone since he read Victor's words. And yet, was it only one night?—already it seemed a lifelong pain and disappointment. But it was only one night!

The first blow that comes, shaking like an earthquake the hopes of a young heart, is wont to be thus crushing; and though hopes may again bud and blossom above the ruins, as they do after an earthquake, they are never the same hopes. Sorrow is like sin, in this: once fall, and however high one may afterward rise, there is always a scar in the background. Nature, only, is entirely able to put aside all traces of former ruin; man may hide from man, but memory never dies; but, "in nature, the summer remains summer, the lily remains the lily, the star the star." And only those who have bravely gathered up the fragments that remain of broken hopes, and gone forth, determined, by God's grace, to make the most of the life left, know how pitiless, in the first days of grief, the sunshine and the flowers sometimes seem. And yet, without them, how the dreariness would deepen; and so we thank God for sunshine and flowers, even when the one falls, and the others grow on graves!

With the coming of the daylight Nathan roused himself, and took courage to read the after-part of

Victor's letter—a postscript that hurt even more than the loss of Hester's love, for it revealed the utter shallowness of the heart to whose keeping she had intrusted her earthly happiness.

"At the Chateau"—thus Victor wrote—"you may chance to meet a last-year's lady-love of mine, pretty Victorine Valais. I yield all my claim to her affections to you, my brother; and avail yourself of them, I urge, for she is bright as the land of sunshine, and with a heart as affectionate as a cooing dove, and a voice sweet as the nightingale's."

This was how Victor Parret passed over and let drop from his mind the memory of the young, bright life he had shadowed; for though Victorine married that very May-time, according to her mother's wish, and though her elderly husband was kind and patient with her wayward moods, and she lived to know many after-years of quiet happiness, the remembrance of that early dream of love, and the story of all the deceit it had led her into, and the self-respect forfeited by untruth, made that time of young life a place for memory to shun—which was a sad thing; for youth is meant to be a season to which the aging love to return in thought, as birds love to return to their last-year's nests.

VI.

NATHAN felt he could not read Hester's words in the place that had been darkened by his knowledge of his brother's falseness. He longed for solitude, too; and yielding to the desire, he determined to spend the day among the hills he had learned to know so well. Hence, he penned a hasty note to Madame Parret, telling her the news from home had not been according to his hopes, and that he would explain on his return toward eventide. Then he gathered up the letters scattered on the table, and thrusting them into the secretary, he locked it, and taking Hester's, with its still unbroken seal, he went forth into the early morning.

As he passed with a light tread down the broad stairway, and through the wide hall, he heard the stir of daily life already beginning in the courtyard and outbuildings, and on the threshold of the porch he met Madame's own maid, to whom he intrusted the delivery of his note. And then, with no delay, he hastened down the avenue, only pausing to ask for a roll of bread and a handful of dried figs from Jean, the lodge-keeper's daughter, who was just opening

the gates for the day. It took but a moment for her to re-enter the house at the entrance of the orange-grove, and she returned, bringing, in addition to the refreshments for which he had asked, a cup of still smoking coffee, clear as amber, and, to Nathan, strength-giving as nectar, for he was more worn and faint than he knew from the long, sleepless night of mental conflict and pain.

After that, with no loitering, he sought the wooded path that led him to the silence of God's great church, the Sanctuary of the Hills, where the arches were the tree-boughs, the dome the blue sky. Consciously, he paid no heed to the beauty surrounding him, in the dewy freshness of that opening day; and yet the roadside was a hedge of roses that shut in fields planted thick with the broad-leaved fig-trees that were laden, at that season, with the delicate green, cup-like buds of fruit that would ripen later on—buds that had a way of seeming to lift the tree-boughs *up*, rather than to weigh them down; this being a peculiarity of the fig, and perhaps one reason for its emblematic use in the Bible words that tell, they “dwell safely, every man under his vine and under his fig-tree,”—“they shall sit every man under his fig-tree, and none shall make them afraid”; for only, as like the fig-buds, we look *up*, can we know safety.

There were almond and quince orchards, too, opening off from that up-hill road, and vineyards where terraced vistas were robed in green leafage, interblended with clustering blossoms that exhaled a fragrance so sweet it filled the air like the odor of precious incense. Though the valleys and lowlands were still veiled in the tender, violet mist of dawn, the sunlight was shining clear and bright on every hill-top when at last Nathan came to the sheltered nook he sought—a tangled bit of wild dell between a cleft in the hill, that widened on beyond into a deep gorge of densely-wooded ravine. With sunrise, the air had become jubilant with the matin-songs of glad birds, while the hum of bees blended a softer note in the high carnival of song. But, just as he had seemed unconscious of the beauty about his path, so now Nathan seemed not to hear the music of happy bird and insect life; and yet, years afterward, he could recall every sight and sound that belonged to that hour. He even remembered the color and the form of the flowers by the roadside, and how a fleecy cloud floated for a moment before the sunbeam falling on Hester's letter, casting a shadow across the white page.

Yet, though Nature was making no conscious impression on Nathan's mind, there were other voices speaking in his soul with no uncertain

sound; for he seemed to see and hear and feel the weight of the events that had marked every year of his life since infancy. But before we heed those voices, we will read Hester's words, which were natural and frank, every sentence a reflection of her pure, true soul, and every one served to make her dearer to Nathan; and while this added dearness increased the pain of knowing she was not his, there was balm in it, too, for the sure knowledge that she was worthy to retain her place in his heart as the *ideal* of all sweet, womanly loveliness, was the truest comfort then, and always, that could have been granted him.

Hester wrote: "When my heart opened to the happy secret of my love for Victor, it opened, too, to what before it had only half recognized—and then I knew that you felt toward me as Victor feels; and remembering the sudden joy which illumined your face the hour when we parted in the moonlight, and I gave the token hand-clasp, my heart was filled, even in its happiness, with the deepest sadness and regret, for I knew you had misunderstood my meaning. You thought—oh! Nathan, I know you thought—that I meant I cared for you as I care for Victor, and—and I do not. And yet, perhaps, all these weeks you have been believing it! I am, oh! so sorry for that thought—

less act. Tell me, can you, will you forgive me? And will you come home, and be to me the dear brother you have been, for so many years? Think,—ever since I was a baby-girl, with only strength enough to clap my tiny hands in glee over the golden chains of buttercups you used to twine for me; and do you remember how you used to weave the daisies into flowery balls, that my little feet would dance over the meadow-grass to catch?" Yes,—all too well Nathan remembered.

Before ending her letter, Hester noticed, by a few words, the wonder which she knew would be in Nathan's mind, over the fact of her having consented to wed one who had not yet found his chief motive in life in the service and worship of her Heavenly Friend and Saviour. "Surely, I am not wrong,"—thus she wrote—"in trusting that God will use my love for Victor as the means of leading him to know the Heavenly Love; for there are some souls who seem only able to learn it as it is made plain to them by their knowledge of human affection"; and she added, "I suppose this is why God teaches little children their first lessons by the alphabet of father and mother-love, which is a stepping-stone to their after-knowledge of the Father and Mother God, whose great name is *Love*."—The letter ended: "Your true heart will be glad in my joy,

—yes, I know it will—and again I beg you to come home."

These extracts are mere bits from the full pages, but they are enough to reveal Hester's guileless nature, which some may call an insipid portrayal of womanly character; while others will catch the reflection of her childlike heart, that was free from childishness, and endued with a simplicity which was forceful, as well as simple. Then, too, Hester was far above insipidity; for one of her marked traits was the hand-in-handness of her conscience with a steadfast power of will that gave her, timid though she was by nature, courage to follow by right action the pointings of duty, as well as of affection. It was this mastery of the spiritual over all other emotions that breathed through those written words, and gave them power to influence Nathan that day, soothing him as only the good and true can be soothed by truth and goodness. And as he read and pondered, he made a wide reach upward toward his high ideal of noble manhood; for he took his first real step in passing beyond self, and the test of this effort consisted in his striving to refrain from *bitterness* in his condemnation of Victor. Angry he was, and that was right, for there is a righteous indignation that all true men must feel toward false men; but that is a very

different anger from the bitterness which seeks to punish the offender, rather than to eradicate the fault.

Nathan's success in this effort was manifested when the time came for him to tell the story to eagerly-interested and warmly-sympathetic Madame Parret; for he found it was not without struggle he refrained from bitter, harsh words of his brother; but he did refrain—and entered into no details, and Madame asked for none. Thus, he escaped what he had dreaded as the hardest part, of sharing even the outer rim of his disappointment with another. Madame also straightway disarmed his fear that, by speaking of his trouble, he would, in a certain way, give her freedom to refer to it; for, without any lengthy discourse, she expressed her belief that sorrows were one's own possessions, as much as joys, and that no one had a right to intrude them, if the sufferer chose to be silent. This privilege of silence Nathan certainly desired to regard as his right, as, indeed, it is the right of all who suffer. It is strange how often kind, good people, and refined in well-nigh every other point, forget this, claiming as an outgrowth of confidence reposed in them entire freedom to introduce the subject according to their own will and pleasure; when, sometimes, to such a person as Nathan Parret, the mere knowledge that

his trouble is in another's mind, is almost more than he can bear; while the having it referred to is like the striking with a rough hand the delicate strings of a harp.

It was the sense—though she gave no sign of it—that his disappointment was uppermost in the thoughts of Madame, that determined Nathan to leave the Chateau at once, though he would go forth as a wanderer, for he had relinquished all plans for immediate return home. Before leaving, he encountered an explanation with Victorine that was far more painful than his interview with his kind old friend, for, in speaking to the young girl, he was forced to face Victor's double-dealing, as well as to again express his regret for the deception into which it had led her. But the harshness which had marked his manner and words when Victorine had sought his counsel, had gone now; for, regarding Hester, as he did, much as one regards an angel of whom thoughts are all holy, he necessarily saw something of good in all women for her sake. Hence, he found in Victorine possibilities that outran his hopes, and, through the exercise of charity in judging her, he made a second step in his soul's upward history. For, to be loving in our thoughts, and looking for good rather than evil, is always an advance upward, more especially since it is true that while,

as Goethe tells us, "light is above and color around us, we cannot perceive them *outside* us, unless we have color and light *within*, in our own eyes"; and the soul makes the atmosphere through which the eye perceives. Yet, though Nathan had gained a certain foothold in self-mastery, he was still building on the sand, for he had not sought the Rock Foundation. To do that, he needed something more than loving thoughts and regard for principle, according to his own interpretation of a noble life, for he needed to be clothed in the robe of Christ's righteousness, not his own.

This thought brings us round again to the Voices he heard whispering in his soul that morning, when he was shut away from the outer world by the guarding gates of the high hills. It is strange how souls resemble that type of meanings so manifold—Jacob's ladder—for, as the angels of aspiration ascend from the heart of man, broken resolutions and unrealized aspirations descend at the same time; a constant meeting of good and bad, a constant struggle one with the other. It is as though there were two open doors, side by side in the heart, through one of which good thoughts and high aims enter, while through the other rush the foes so eager to assail the soul's citadel; hence one must, in living, be a soldier, whether he will or no. It was

the knowledge of this that had made Mr. Gaylord so eager to have Nathan Parret start in life equipped with the Christian's armor.

The first voice Nathan heard, that hour, some call philosophy, while others call it stoical indifference; but this plea found no place in his heart. Pride in his own strength of endurance next asserted itself, and in imagination he forged weapons and reared mighty bulwarks against life's woes; but even as he reared them, they fell in crumbling ruins about him, for had he not just learned that the hopes of a lifetime can be crushed in the brief space of a minute!—Then came a whisper, urging: "Forget the past; blind eyes and ears to the desolating fact of disappointment,"—but would that give comfort? And could he forget his dead hopes, in the presence of his living sorrow? Nathan grew feverish with the conflict of opposing thoughts, but strange as it seems, though he was so almost persuaded to be a Christian, he still, even in his weariness, turned away from the One and only Voice in his soul that invited toward real Peace. And yet he heard that pleading "still and small," and he knew it called him to seek refuge in something Higher than self,—even in the life of which St. Paul says, "*to live, is Christ.*"

Meanwhile, above the encompassing clouds which

cast over Nathan their trailing shadows of doubt and "halting between two opinions," there shone "the *Star* that sends toward us its Light; and we can no more escape from that Light than we can escape from the shadow of the cloud"; but there is this difference—the Star is abiding, the cloud is transitory. Have patience, then, and the Star-beams will at last penetrate Nathan's darkness;—even then he was already restless—and nearly all our upward-tending feelings can be traced to the being ill-at-ease, dissatisfied with self, and homesick for the

"Countrie

Afar beyond the stars,
Where stands a wingèd sentrie,
All skillful in the wars;
There, above noise and danger,
Sweet Peace sits, crowned with smiles,
And One, born in a manger,
Commands the beauteous files.

• • • • •
If thou canst get but thither,
There grows the flower of peace,
The Rose that cannot wither,—
Thy fortresse, and thy ease."

Nathan left the Chateau in less than a week after the arrival of those home-letters; and he started forth in search of the knowledge which he now determined must fill the empty place in his life. It

was thus he wrote Nan Benson, saying: "Now the Ruler, Love, has failed me, I go to follow the guidance of Master Knowledge. Will that fail, too? Truly, Nan, I am in very truth like Offero of the legend, finding the weakness of one Ruler after another,—first, Strength proved powerless before the might of wind and wave. Next, Wealth I found empty, when, by it, I tried to change the mind of the stalwart New Bedford sea-captain. And Love—you know how it has vanquished me. And now, Knowledge and my Profession!—well, they are left; and before I return, I must test their power to satisfy."

Thus ended the only words Nathan and Nan exchanged during the years of his stay in foreign lands. For that space of time we will leave his story untold, taking it up again at the beginning of the year during which he at last embarked for home, where he arrived in the early summer. It was eight years, and more, since that April day when he, Victor, Hester, Nan, and little Patty, had found the May-flowers under the dead leaves of the last year's fall. Were those leaves, and those flowers, a parable of Nathan Parret's life?

PART III.

*“Look not on thine own loss, but look beyond,
And take the Cross for glory and for guide.”*

*“Richest gifts are those we make,
Dearer than the love we take
That we give for love’s own sake.*

*“Hands that ope but to receive,
Empty close : they only live
Richly, who can richly give.”*

“Who does his soul possess in loving, grows strong.”

I.

EIGHT years! No wonder they wrought a great change in Nathan Parret, not only in outward appearance, but, still more, intellectually and spiritually. When we left him, he was in the season of youth, that time which is wont to be marked by the unfolding of human affections—the time, too, when the heart is apt to be inspired by love and reverence for the Divine;—a season followed by the crowding interests of the world, and its increasing temptations, and Nathan had not escaped the conflict. But temptation assailed him from contesting thoughts, rather than sensuous allurements, and these thoughts had led him for a time far away from the simple teachings of his childhood, and good Mr. Gaylord's later instructions. But, spite this far wandering, there was always an undertone of dissatisfaction; and many an hour he turned to the past with desire, mingled with awe, that almost amounted to consternation over his flights into the realm of speculative thought, and subtle questioning of religious truths.

And yet, Nathan was safer to have abandoned some of the doctrines that had been *sincerely* taught him, than he would have been had he retained them merely *because* thus taught, for he never passed beyond the influence of the fact that his early guides had profoundly *believed* what they taught; never, even when he wandered into the border-land of materialism. But his was not a nature to long linger in that chill atmosphere, and yet when he fled from it he encountered a time of keen mental and spiritual disquiet; for in his disbelief he was honest, and eager to sound to its depth the fathomless abyss of scepticism; hence he passed through a mental and moral experience that has, alas! drifted many a thinker into "the denial of God, save as a general conception of Law, without seeing or feeling any need of a Law-Giver."

In all these experiences, his love and reverence for Truth, and the prayers that had been offered for him ever since his babyhood, were his safety. For, while he learned every letter of the "logic" on which "Positivism" founds its theory, at the same time his mind was open to the beauty of Divine Truth; and gradually, as he investigated one system after another, he came to the innermost meaning and heart of Life, till at last the Truth that had been so dear to him in his youth led him

now, in maturer years, to look into his own heart, and then on to the Unseen; and so step by step, first through penitence, then through faith, the heart of a child had come again to Nathan Parret, and he yielded his will to the Divine Will, revealed through Him, "the Way, the Truth, and the Life," and the passing from the dreary dogmatism of scepticism into the Light of Faith and knowledge of God as a Father, was as dear, beautiful, and wonderful to him as sunrise is beautiful and wonderful after midnight darkness; while the vivid consciousness that he possessed not only a *thinking* mind, but a *living* soul, -was like the glory that made the face of Moses shine when he beheld the veiled presence of God. After that revelation Nathan knew, with a certainty that no argument of subtlest reasoning could shake, that between his soul and his Heavenly Father there was a way of communication opened, mysterious as the fact must ever remain.

In learning all this, one need hardly to be told that Nathan had not found satisfactory service under the Rulers whom, he had written Nan Benson, he went forth to seek; and yet he had attained high honor as a scholar and thinker at Heidelberg, and other European universities; while later, when following his profession in Paris hospitals, he had

won golden opinions, that were waiting to greet him on his return to America.

I have given this brief outline of his spiritual growth, part of the time up, and part down—for alas! a soul can grow down,—as an index of his life during the years of which, in detail, I will be silent. As for his intellectual growth, it had been full and rich; while the moulding influence of the society in which he had mingled, through his connection with the Parret family, had introduced him into the circles most frequented by the leading scholars, both native and foreign, that thronged Paris, at that time the centre of intellectual life in Europe. And his manners had acquired an ease and grace that equalled Victor's, in fact surpassed them, for character, spite surface polish, will reflect itself in manners and conversation; and his character then, and on now to the end of his life, combined sweetness and moral nobleness, with an individuality that gave a great charm to his personality. The fact that he had suffered too, and learned sympathy through knowledge of disappointment, had brought the human nature in him into harmonious relations with the human nature around him; for no one can be tossed by a tempest of grief as he had been, no one can struggle with mental doubts and spiritual unrest, and fight with a masterful self-will, like his,

without learning that which opens the way into the needs of other hearts and minds.

As to his appearance: twenty-nine years of healthful life had launched him into the perfection of manhood's physical beauty, and with the impression of power, which his presence gave, there was an undefined atmosphere of mental force, the reign of intellect being traced in every feature of his face, and revealed even in the poise of his head; while his consecration of life and strength to the service of the Master he had at last found to be the "One of all Strength," had given a gentle tenderness to his ways, words, and deeds, that reminded one of St. Paul's words, "We were gentle among you, even as a nurse cherisheth her children." Notwithstanding this, the contradictions which always in a certain way had encompassed Nathan Parret, still held sway, for there was something about him not like a New Englander, and not like a Frenchman; his friends tried in vain to discover what it was, but generally concluded their analysis by the simple confession that he was "Nathan Parret," and that meant a man as unlike most other men as an Alpine pine is unlike the growth of a lowland plain.

A long parenthesis, all this, but it will take but a moment to turn back to the day when Nathan Par-

ret sailed for home. And before we turn to it, let us glance at the home people who are awaiting his coming. For, eight years must have brought many changes to the little group we last beheld all together, as they assembled in the north parlor of Parret House, to listen to Professor Raymond's tale of the sudden storm; and the search that followed for Nathan, and the light skiff, which had danced so gaily over the calm waters, when the sky was blue, and the air golden in the radiance of unclouded summer sunshine.

II.

OUR backward look will begin at the Parsonage, and we will open the door leading into Mr. Gaylord's study, an hour or two before sunset. Looking around the familiar room, it is hard to believe so many years have come and gone since we were there last. Our gaze rests on the same table, strewn with books and papers, and pushed, as in the bygone time, before the westward window, that every ray of latest lingering light may centre on the printed pages and closely-written manuscript. The time of the year is early June, and the room fragrant with the blossoming lilacs and syringas, that grew close to the window-casement. Before the table sits the minister, looking much as when we last saw him, and as deeply absorbed in thought; for truly much of his pondering lay among problems that no mortal ever yet could solve, however profound his reasoning on election and free-will, justice and judgment. By his side sits Mrs. Gaylord, busy as in the old days with needle and thread, and yet, as then, never too much occupied for an occasional look toward her husband, who,

with the quick instinct of a married lover, always felt those tender glances, as flowers feel sunshine, and responded by a smile even when too engrossed for words.

The years had written their story more decidedly on Mrs. Gaylord's appearance than on her husband's. The soft brown hair, that, spite the plainness becoming in the wife of a New England minister, would ripple into stray curls and waves about her open brow, was white now, while the brow, formerly so smooth, showed traces of lines of care and anxiety; nevertheless, Mrs. Gaylord was as sunny-tempered as ever, and she kept to herself whatever anxiety those lines hinted. One thing was sure, the cares that weighed on her motherly heart had nothing to do with Patty, who was as bright-eyed and rosy-cheeked now that the years of her life counted fourteen, as she was when the six-year-old darling Nathan Parret remembered. So winsome was this maiden Patty, that more than one matron among the parish folk predicted that she would rival Hester in the charm of her sweet girlhood. But Patty and Hester were too unlike to ever rival one another, even had there been no stretch of years between them, for Patty had a quick, wayward spirit, all unlike Hester's gentle calm. She was ready of speech, too, like her mother, inheriting

also the same easy adaptability to people and circumstances; and young as she was, there was no mystery of housewifely skill that she could not compass, while already there were piles of snowy towels and napkins stored away in Mrs. Gaylord's cedar chest that Patty's little hands had woven, for she was as dexterous in the use of her mother's large spinning-wheel as with her own small one.

This was the outward Patty—a creature of song and gladness, with brown, wavy hair, a forehead white and high, and eyes blue as the sky. As for the inward, there were quiet pools in Patty's young heart, spite the outward shimmer and sparkle, still places where were hidden away the deep things of the girl's nature. In the quietest, deepest nook of all was safely cherished her childhood's affection for Nathan.

But we must not tarry longer with the inmates of the Parsonage, but speed on to Hester's home; and our way to Parret House, as you will remember, passes by the turn of the road that leads by the up-hill path to Judge Benson's, where Nan was still the maiden daughter; for though many a suitor, old and young, had trod that up-hill path, never one had come down from the white house rejoicing in success.

Of all the persons who have flitted across the

pages of this history of Nathan Parret, Nan Benson is the least changed by time. Her eyes have their old flash still, her words their old sparkle, and her voice is as sweet and clear as ever as she leads the choir of the village church. For the change that came to Nan with the passing years was a change of heart, and not of outward appearance, and it was manifested in a softening and mellowing of the rough points in her nature. Being of a steadfast mind, her youthful affection for Nathan had not abated, spite the years since they parted.

But it is time we left Nan, and sought out Hester Gaylord,—Hester Parret now, and mother, too, of a brave little lad and wee sisters, each lovely and sweet, though the sweetest of all her flock to Hester's mother-heart was the tender lamb the Heavenly Shepherd carried safe in His arms of Love, and whose tiny grave Patty had heaped high with the first wild-flowers of the spring.

Approaching the old House by the way of the high-road, there was little to tell of change. The maples over toward the Chateau side were robed in the tenderest garment of all the year—the first beauty of summer's early green; while the horse-chestnut trees on either side of the dooryard gate were only just beginning to unfurl their young leaves, and there was no sign of their full, rich blos-

soms, except on some few outmost branches which the sunbeams kissed all day long.

Miss Amanda is the first to demand our attention as we enter the mansion, though it is hard to persuade oneself that the thin, worn face looking out from the crimson cushions of the rocking-chair can be the active woman of eight years ago. But the first sound of her voice silences all doubt, for that tone surely can be none other than Miss Amanda's. Hers is a common enough story among the New England hills. A woman resolute in the performance of duty, spite weakening strength and failing power, and then a sudden break,—which the village doctor called “a shock”—since which Miss Amanda had been helpless as the youngest of Hester's baby-girls, little Susie, who could not yet take a step alone. There was the usual amount of surprise felt over the sudden prostration of a woman strong as Miss Amanda, and there was kindly sympathy expressed for the helpless invalid, as well as for Hester, on whom an added care had come; many grave looks and sighs being blended with the whispered comments on the trouble that, without this new trial, was heavy enough. But there was no call for sympathy for Hester, as far as Miss Amanda was concerned; for the sixty years of the good woman's life bore a blessed harvest those days of her en-

feebled strength; and never once, even when the weakest, did she yield to the fretful restlessness that sometimes so overshadows an aging life. And if her voice was sharp, it was not because of any lack of gentleness in her heart—this the children knew, and a visit to “Grandy Mandy’s” room was the reward offered for any special act of childlike submission, or yielding of self-will or selfishness. Even Victor’s voice softened when he came into the presence of the old housekeeper, who had been tender as a mother to the Parret brothers. Victor! how can I tell the alteration that had come to him? Truly, it is a tale from which I so much shrink I will leave it untold, and you can gather an impression of it from the change in Hester. Such a pitiful change! One glance revealed something was sorely amiss in her life, though she never put it into words—not even to her mother. Indeed, it had never been Hester’s habit to give utterance to disappointment; but she could not hide the hint of it, which appeared in a certain paling of her always pale face, while the light in her eyes deepened, and they seemed to grow larger and darker, with a more far-away look in them. But Hester’s is no uncommon story; alas! hundreds of women’s faces tell much the same tale. In brief outline, it takes but a minute to narrate, for it is little more than a history of

anxiety and hope—the anxiety, a slow dying of heart, the trusting, an eager clinging to daily lessening hopes, like that with which a drowning mariner clasps a drifting spar. And yet Hester lived, and went through her tasks much as a happy wife would have done, for she was not a weak woman, and, above all, she was a Christian; hence, when joy went out of her life, she did not neglect the duties that remained; and striving to fulfil each one, "as unto the Lord," His Love had led her to the pastures of Peace, even though they did up-spring in the valley of shadows. And then, she had her children—the brave boy, Adolph, and the little maidens, Ruey and baby Sue. This story of Hester's is not to be wondered at, when one remembers that it would hardly be possible to find two persons more unlike in character and temperament than she and her husband; and this dissimilarity, which, had the motives and high purposes and hopes of their souls been in harmony, would have added the charm of perpetual freshness to their intercourse, only served, without it, to widen the lack of sympathy. Hester had not been wedded a month before she began to realize this; for, having won her for his wife, Victor, secure in the possession of her love, lessened, first one and then another, of the observances by which he had blinded her, during the

days of courtship, to his real indifference to sacred things.

Even to a dull nature it is hard to wake up to such disappointment, and to a woman sensitive as Hester, it was keen agony. At first she sought reason after reason for excusing Victor; she even tried to blame herself. She strove also to remember she must not expect too much from him, and she sought comfort from the Bible verse which has comforted so many anxious women,—“That is not *first* which is spiritual, but that which is natural.” And this was the comfort she clung to for years. Years during which Victor’s desire after what he called life, led him farther and farther away from Hester and home; meanwhile, the egotistical, tyrannical, and capricious elements in his nature gained rapid ascendency over the better traits of his heart. But, during all that time, he never entirely lost the magnetic power of attraction which he had always possessed, and which served to conceal from Mr. Gaylord the real truth that his wife’s quicker eye detected notwithstanding Hester’s silence.

Victor’s departure from home, too, had with the years become more and more frequent, while the wealth left him by both father and mother was vanishing before his reckless, extravagant self-indul-

gence. And many an anxiety weighed on Miss Amanda and Hester, though outwardly, Parret House and its inmates gave the impression of wealth and prosperity. This was the condition of the home to which Nathan was returning, with a heart full of hope, after his eight years' absence.

III.

THE sweet June day was drawing toward its ending, as the rumbling coach in which Nathan was a passenger, came to the familiar milestone, with its rudely-carved arrow-head, and lichen-grown figures, $2\frac{1}{2}$, pointing toward N——. The air was warm and bright with the reflected glow of the sun, which, as it neared the mystic line, where the western hills and the sky met, flooded the landscape with a glowing light. So intense was this soft shimmer of summer brightness, Nathan, from his high perch on the coach-box, could only make out in a fragmentary way—through the finely-woven web of golden rays—the scene that was as well remembered, as if he had travelled the road but yesterday. Over everything there brooded, too, the sweet, reposed quiet, which is nature's Benediction during the summer-time for late afternoon and early twilight. The steady rumbling of the coach wheels, blended with the regular beat of the horses' hoofs on the hard road, an occasional flutter of wings, and the "caw-caw" of a flock of solemn, black-winged crows, rising from some near corn-

field, were the only sounds that broke this hush. The coach had reached the top of the last hill, when Nathan caught his first glimpse of the turrets of Parret House, and in a wavy line, curling about them, he traced a faint wreath of shadowy, haze-like smoke. The sight of it quickened his pulse, and truly he felt then, as he did for the next half hour, that the joy of return well-nigh compensated for his long exile.

Knowing, as "Nathan did, every rod of the way, after the coach passed the wide stretch of corn and wheat-fields that marked the outer boundary of Judge Benson's farm, he dismounted, bidding his aforetime acquaintance—Joe, the driver—announce his arrival by the delivery of his luggage at the north door of the homestead, while he approached it by the woodland path, the way to which opened just there. It led at first through a tangled thicket, that reached half across Judge Benson's corn-field, looking in the hazy light like a projecting promontory, that reached out seaward, breaking the monotony of an otherwise unbroken coast-line. The road had been little travelled of late, and it stretched before him, a somewhat dim, undefined path, as he strove to pierce the gloom of the deepening shadows. It was much as it is when we strive to read the onward page of the future by the light of to-

day; which is something we can never do; for, thank God, while He has opened wide the windows through which our souls look backward, the future, even of to-morrow, is as much a secret as the story of a century hence. As Nathan entered the woods he at once became conscious of the sweet, aromatic fragrance that haunts such places, especially when a bit of marsh land is not far off. He stood still for a minute, inhaling the well-remembered odor of sweet-fern and pennyroyal, combined with the woody perfumes that are never so full as toward nightfall. Passing on, the sound of his feet treading on the dry leaves of last year's fall, and the occasional snap of some tree-bough that lay across his path, served to wake up the silent forest, and sounds that carried him back to boyhood greeted him from every side. Even the shrill note of the frog's dismal croak came floating up from the swamp meadow, vibrating the air with a hundred different echoes, that each one held something like music for him, while a late bird breathed out an even-song, as sweet as the melody of the French nightingale's. As for the flowers, they were all there, not one missing, from the most lowly growing to the great branches of star-like, wide-open dogwood, and wild azalea, pink as a sea-shell. The columbines, too, were all a-nodding as a gentle breeze played among

their cup-like clusters ; he paused to gather a handful, and to wonder what the mute things would fain say, if their swinging bells could become fairy-like voices. This was the greeting nature gave Nathan, and with a soul thrilling with gladness, he passed out of the woods across the open field that led into the garden that went by the name of "Sunny France." It was here he met the first chill of disappointment, for the gate hung loose, with hinge and latch both broken ; and as his glance fell on the garden beds, he missed their old-time order, for now they were overgrown by a rank growth of phlox, purple and white, with clumps of peonies, and ribbon-grass, and weeds, "country cousins" and "beg-of-my-neighbor," that had pushed aside the delicate rootlets of the choice plants that had been dear to his father, and later on, to himself. When Nathan reached the vine-covered porch, even a sadder tale of neglect awaited him, for the climbing vines that had made it a bower-like place—sweet Provence roses and prairie-bells, honeysuckle and clustering clematis, hung a wild tangle of twisted branches, many of them trailing on the ground for lack of some upholding support. The windows on that Chateau side of the house, also added to the general look of desolation, for they were nearly all close shut and barred.

For a minute, he sat down on the broad step

of the porch, which, though it was June-time, lay heaped high in crevice and corner with the dead leaves blown by the wintry winds into their sheltered nooks; and it was then and there that he realized the fact that he had come to a changed home. It was the sound of a child's voice that roused him, and, as he arose and walked slowly under the shadows of the maples, round to the north entrance of the mansion, suddenly he found himself face to face with Hester. Nathan had schooled his heart to look forward calmly to this meeting. But, could that be Hester?—Hester, whom he had left in the full beauty of her youth and unshadowed life! This is what he saw: a tall, slender woman, in figure much the same as the Hester he remembered. She was simply dressed, too, as had been her wont; and clinging to the folds of her soft gray gown, stood, with uplifted face, a sturdy little lad, whom Nathan at once knew must be Adolph. In her arms she held a baby-girl—a rosy-faced child,—while another, full as rosy and sweet, was striving with all her baby strength to push Adolph away, and thus win a place close by her mother's side. To a stranger it would have seemed a fair picture—a young mother, with a calm, Madonna face, surrounded by her flock of little ones, each, after its own baby fashion, seeking from her the satisfaction of some baby

want; for "Mother" was their first call when, like the flowers, they awoke at sunrise, and "Mother" the last whispered word when, like the flowers still, they closed their bright eyes at sundown, and slept the dreamless sleep of happy childhood.

If this had been all Nathan had seen, the beauty of the picture would have filled his brave, true heart with emotions of thankful content that would have shut it tight against any memory of the "might-have-been." But it was Hester's face on which he gazed; and as he gazed, he remembered the look gone from it, and he noted the look that had come into it! And, after that first glance, he needed no detailed story of the years of her married life. It was enough to show him that the wife of his brother Victor, the mother of those little children, was altogether unlike the Hester of his earlier days. Seeing this, and knowing what it meant, strong man though he was, Nathan Parret struggled with a sharp pain that was like a sudden warping of his heart, as he looked, and looked in vain, for Hester—Hester Gaylord.

Her welcome was tender and loving as a sister's, and if her lips quivered,—if her eyes filled with tears, and a shadow of trouble flitted across her face as she greeted Nathan—it was not from any sickly sentiment that pressed the memory of their parting

into their meeting. No! Hester's emotion was centred around the fear that Nathan must now soon know what she had been so careful to hide from him. "But not to-night, not to-night," her wifely heart softly whispered, adding, "for surely a wife has a right to sorrows, into which even a brother may not look." It was thus Hester thought, as she led the way across the hall to the north parlor, now given up to Miss Amanda's use. The door was ajar, the windows were open, too, and the sick woman had caught the sound of Nathan's step, as he came around the house; and in her eagerness, she half raised herself from the cushioned chair, as she called: "Nathan, my boy!" Yes, he was a boy, to her; and kneeling by her side, feeling the touch of her kindly hands on his bowed head, truly Nathan Parret was a child again.

It is such a beautiful thing, this blessed power of brief returns to childhood, which in a certain sense never is lost, so long as those whom we called in our early days Father and Mother are left on earth to bless us, and to call us "My child!" At that dear familiar call, weary, life-worn men, and tired, heartsick women are children once more, spite whitening hair and dimming eyes; only the orphaned know what it means to wake up to the knowledge that no one is left on earth to ever again whisper, "My child!"

IV.

THE hours immediately following Nathan's arrival were full of mingled light and shade; for the taking up life after an interval of years, just where one left it, is as impossible as it is to bring back yesterday. And, at best, the striving to fill up the silent space must be an unsatisfactory effort. There is, too sad a consciousness of the changes time has wrought for it to be otherwise; too intense a reviving of a past that belongs to a departed life. Then, too, at such hours there is apt to be a strange blending of deeply earnest with lesser interests. And, as Nathan asked after old neighbors, and the news of the country-side,—who had married, and who had gone from earth,—his thoughts were at the same time centred around Victor, and the sudden blush and look of care that had flitted across Hester's face at every mention of her husband's name.

It was a relief, when, like a flash of joy, Patty came dancing into the room to tell, in a voice gay as the song of a lark, the good news, Joe, the stage-driver, had entrusted to her, with the message that

Hester was to send to the village inn for Nathan's luggage. Patty was half startled to find her news anticipated, and she could hardly believe the tall stranger was in very truth the Nathan for whose safe return home she had prayed every night and morning for eight years. But Patty's surprise was light compared with Nathan's wonder over the fact, that the rosy maiden, standing before him, was none other than his child friend. As he strove to adjust his mind to the change, Patty was regarding him, much as she would had he been some knightly hero of a bygone age, suddenly introduced into that quiet New England town. Only by an effort could she refrain from running away, to tell the tale of this wonderful stranger, who, after all, was only Nathan Parret. It was to the inmates of the white house, on the top of the hill,—Nan Benson's home,—that she was most eager to carry the tidings; and then, after telling Nan, she would spread the news from one end to the other of the village street. But Hester restrained her, for instinctively she felt a desire to have Nathan and Nan meet with no prefacing announcement. After a minute Patty was well satisfied to remain; for like the children, she speedily felt at ease with the new-comer, toward whom they had made no delay in extending overtures of welcome, discerning with

the quick intuition of childhood that he was to be trusted. Indeed, Ruey nestled into his arms, and listened to his voice with a smile of contentment as complete as that with which, later on, she hearkened to her mother's cooing lullaby. And from that hour this dear little maid regarded "Uncle Nathan" as her special property. Even that first evening, when "sleepy time" came, she would let no one else carry her up-stairs, while, with an imperious wave of her tiny hand, that was oddly like Victor's babyhood assertion of self-will, she refused to leave Nathan's arms to bid "Granny Mandy" good-night. And so he stooped and held the sweet, fresh child-face down close to the worn, aged face of the kindly old woman. And if there were tears in Nathan's eyes at that moment, surely they were tokens of strength rather than weakness. The good-night kiss given, little Ruey still pleaded for more indulgence and begged to kneel on Nathan's knee, bowing her curly head on his broad shoulder, while she lisped the simple prayer sacred to childhood, repeating each word softly after Miss Amanda's guiding voice, just as Nathan had done when a little lad. This was the sweetest experience of his return home, after he opened the gate with the broken latch. Patty followed Nathan and Ruey up-stairs, and on the landing Hester was waiting

for them. And after giving the child to her mother, Nathan made a brief tarrying before returning to Miss Amanda, while he entered once more his old room. Hester had been before him, and opened wide the windows and closed blinds; and with nothing to interfere, he looked out, and up into the tree-boughs that were heavy with the soft green of the June leafage, which was astir with birds seeking their nests among the leafy branches, and each, with no mistake, finding its own. By some sudden caprice of memory, the likeness of it to bygone Junes, stirred the spiritual atmosphere of Nathan's soul with remembrances that encompassed him with a radiance that was akin to nature's golden glory of the late afternoon; and as the past came back to him in softer colors and fainter voices than the reality had held, he felt, spite the disappointment he had known, that life was a beautiful, blessed thing.

During the minutes of Nathan's musing, Nan had crossed the threshold of Parret House, it being her custom to come between the daylight and the dark for a good-night word with her old friend. With her wonted freedom from restraint, when alone with Miss Amanda, Nan sat down like a child on a low stool by the old lady's side, entirely unmindful of the years that divided her from girlhood;

for Nan was nigh on thirty, there being but a few months' difference in her age and Nathan's. She was all a-flutter with joy over Miss Amanda's announcement of his arrival, but he entered the room so quietly she did not hear him approaching; thus their meeting was as natural and unstudied as though the parting had been but yesterday. And, to Nathan, Nan seemed as unchanged as the wild-flowers that had looked up at him from their haunts by the bank-sides of the wood-road.

For a moment there was silence, as they gazed intently at one another; then Nathan stretched out his hand, saying: "I am so glad you have not altered." Nan's reply was like her old self, for she laughed, while a bright glance flashed from her dark eyes; and, as she laughed, truly she did look the very Nan of bygone years. Sometimes a woman does thus keep her youth long after, according to time's counting, she has passed beyond it. Is it because, unconsciously to herself, there is in her heart a fore-gleam of something glad and beautiful that life still may hold for her?—and does that something sing a song sweet as the murmur of the breeze that heralds a message of summer? I think it is thus, for when God does not grant spring flowers to His children, often He sends summer blossoms into their lives; and if the summer, like the

spring, withholds these heart-blooms, have you never noticed how brightly the blossoms of autumn glow with warm color and rich fragrance? and,—wonderful as it seems—if spring, summer, and autumn flowers fail, there are now and then winter blossoms, Christmas roses! I wonder will the time ever come when we will read and understand, better than we do now, the language of type and parable that Nature is never weary of repeating?—an open parable for Nan Benson, for flowers had bloomed for her with every season of her life's story; and they always would, for she trod life's path without its ever growing dusty and fretted by the little worries and everydayness that, according to the way in which a woman meets them, make life either savorless and dull, or beautiful and bright with a never-failing freshness, which accepts the blessed truth that passing and seemingly insignificant occupations, hold elements of the eternal in their on-reaching issues, which clasp tendrils from the now shifting present, on to the Unseen and everlasting Hereafter.

It was this dewy freshness of Nan's spirit that Nathan straightway felt, and which, like a song without words, told him she had made the most of life's small joys and the least of its great trials. He felt, also, that she had not done this by her own unaided strength; and, as he realized this, he re-

membered that spiritual dew, like that which refreshes flowers and all growing things, falls in the darkness,—and—had Nan known darkness? That was a question to ponder.

As the light grew dim in the room,—for even summer twilights wane,—Miss Amanda closed her eyes, not so much to sleep as to think, and thank God for Nathan's return. Meanwhile, Hester did not join them, for, after Patty left her, she sat down by the open window to wait for the children to go to sleep, and then she fell into a reverie which lasted long. Against the still-glowing western sky the outlines of the hills were sharply defined, while the upward slope of their sides were in shadow, hence vague and mysterious; but, as the light paled in the west, a silvery gleam from the rising moon gave promise that soon its soft beams would dispel shadow and mystery—a sign of hope Hester was not slow in reading. The stillness of the hour was only broken by sounds now and then from the barnyard, or the bark of a dog, and the low murmur of Nathan's and Nan's voices, speaking softly, not to disturb Miss Amanda—a murmur that blended in with the hum of insects, that after-sundown melody that belongs to summer twilights, when it seems as though every one of the gay-winged, fluttering things that all day long have made merry in the

sunshine unite in a good-night chorus. But Hester was listening for something far different, for, though used to disappointment, to her wifely heart no sound was so welcome as that which announced her husband's return home. And yet, he had so failed her! Thinking of it, no wonder she laid her head on the window-sill and sobbed aloud. But not being given to tears, after a minute she checked them, and was calm again, as she hearkened for the first faint sound of Victor's approach. Anxiety knocked loudly at her heart meanwhile, till it trembled with dread forebodings, for—How would he return?

So eager and overstrained became this anxiety, she caught the rumble of swiftly-revolving wheels before Victor's gig had reached the level road at the base of the hill. When it reached that point, Nan heard, too, and, with her tender love, she hastened to depart; for she knew Hester would rather have the brothers meet, with no eye save her own to note the look of indignation and grief that Nan felt would be on Nathan's face; while Victor's would tell a story, half of fear and half of surly indifference.

Without explanation, Nathan understood Nan's motive, and he offered no remonstrance to her refusal of his escort home. It had been a pleasant

hour to them both, and yet it was as well to have it end ; for Nan, in turning the pages of memory's book, had come to the April day when they had gathered the May-flowers, and later on read the legend of St. Christopher; and it was better not to touch too closely that memory, certainly during this first hour of meeting. And yet, with the half-playful archness which was apt to mark her manner, as Nathan opened the gate, she looked up toward him with a smile, saying: "Tell me, what of the Life Rulers?"—and her voice softened, as she added, "Have you found the 'One of all Strength'?" At that question, she became deeply earnest, and, without waiting for a reply, she said: "Oh! Nathan; if it be that, in following that One and only true Master, He calls you to carry some weak, sin-sick soul over the River of temptation, will you, like Offero of old, lift the burden?" As she thus asked, Victor came driving swiftly up the road ; and yet, before he reached the home gate, she had time to whisper: "Do you remember, it is written, 'He findeth his *own* brother; and he brought *him* to Jesus'?"

V.

NAN'S words were the key-note to the duties that greeted Nathan Parret hardly more than twenty-four hours after his arrival. Sad indeed was the story to which he hearkened. A tale told him not only by Miss Amanda and Judge Benson, but more pitifully, alas, by Victor's own looks and words. But I have no mind to detail this chapter of evil; enough for you to know is the sad fact that Victor had wandered into paths of dishonor and intemperance. And now the question was, how to help him back to the ways of righteousness and peace. This was Nathan's chief thought, for a soul like his is always more ready to think of the good rather than of the evil. But how to fan into life the blighted and well-nigh destroyed desire after Higher things, was a problem that has puzzled many beside Nathan. In Victor's case it seemed more hopeless from the fact of his weakness of principle and unsteadiness of purpose, except in matters that had to do with his own self-gratification.

Nathan realized that the first upward step re-

quired that he should associate with his superiors rather than inferiors, and this involved severance from the companions Victor had sought for years —a set of idle, dissolute men, who, attracted by his wealth and weakness, had gathered about him, and to whose guidance he had yielded himself, much as a silly fly yields to a spider.

Though the lives of these brothers had been always marked by contrast, never had it been so apparent as at this time, when Nathan's soul lived in a climate all unlike Victor's; and yet, in more than one prominent trait of character, they still resembled one another, thus demonstrating the truth, "that it is not a man's natural character, but the *use* he makes of it, which stamps him as good or evil." But I said I would not detail wrong-doing, and indeed there is no need, when the fashion of the time is to analyze the subtle working of sin in the hearts of men and women, till we meet its story on, alas, far too many printed pages. A matter for deep regret, for, can we become familiar with the details of evil without losing something from our own hearts? Must we know every step of the path the tempted have trod before we can point to the way of return? Must we know evil to be able to help from evil? I think not; for I believe we never listen to unnecessary details of sin, or let

our eyes rest on printed records of it, however powerful it may make the story, without weakening our power to help the erring ; for there is an untold upward influence exerted on the sinner, from the very fact that the one striving to help him is ignorant, as well as innocent, of the depth out of which the hand of love would fain guide. Love—that is the knowledge our hearts need if we are to help wanderers from darkness to light. Just Love—Christ's Love—it is the only remedy ; for it points to forgiveness through His Divine compassion.

All this has nothing to do with Nathan Parret's determination to cast aside the offers of high importance, as the world counts position, which were extended to him from near and far on his return to his own country. His refusal of these honors met with strong remonstrance from many of his friends, among former classmates and instructors ; they even held up to ridicule the narrow sphere he had chosen, bounded by the practice of a New England village and township. But was it thus bounded ? And is any sphere narrow, wherein we may worship God, and serve His creatures ? That Nathan's friends did not all recognize this spiritual wideness is not to be wondered at, when we remember even the breaking of the box of precious ointment was a waste in the eyes of our Lord's own

disciples! But Nathan knew there was in real truth as broad a field for service in and about his own home, as in the cities to which he was invited,—either to fill the place of a professor, or practitioner of medicine,—the difference being, not in the importance of the work needing to be done, and the influence needing to be exerted, but in the fact that the more public position would win wider notice and fame; and this he resisted, though it cost his ambition more of a struggle than he liked to own even to himself. But the conflict once over, he entered cheerfully into partnership with the village physician, Dr. Page, a man so rapidly aging, that before two years had gone by, the burden and responsibility of the work rested on Nathan, and earnestly he took it up. This practice of medicine was his outward life-work; as for the hidden work, the striving to reclaim his brother Victor from the bondage of sin, often it pressed heavily and seemed a well-nigh hopeless task; but even at the darkest, Nathan never lost courage; and time sped on, till it counted a full decade since his return to his native land.

VI.

IT is strange how, in our earth-bound histories, after a stretch of uneventful years, there is wont to come a period marked by experiences as important and pronounced as Nature's four seasons in the revolving year. It was thus in Nathan Parret's life the year of which I now tell ; and the events stood out like pictures, each portraying a different scene, in circumstances as unlike as the stories which make the separate cantos of some poem of a by-gone age. They will not take long to describe, and after their recountal, we will close this record, for we must needs leave it an unending tale, since it purports to be the recital of a soul's life; for no one ever yet could follow a soul to the very end, when this mortal life that we know is but the beginning of the immortal. There is, also, too much of solitude in a soul's history for it to be aught more than a fragmentary record, when told by words. This aloneness of soul,—I wonder why the sense of it, to our finite comprehension, becomes so much more profound as the end of earthly existence draws near? And yet, how we mistake about

it; we cry aloud in our anguish because we must go, or, harder still, let our dearest go, out into the mystery and silence, unaccompanied by human companionship; for all we can do, with all our love, is to hold close the hand of the departing till its clasp loosens, and Heaven's gate swings wide, opening for one to enter, closing for one to stay without. Yes, it is all we can do; hence, no wonder we cry, "Oh! that we might die in pairs, or companies!" And who knows but we do? For, though our mortal eyes are holden, who knows what blessed companionship there may be waiting in the silence and the mystery, to enter Heaven hand-in-hand with our beloved? But while our knowledge of this must be vague as an undefined hope, one thing is sure—even while we, because of the limitations of our present understanding, think and speak of the loneliness of a soul parting from the familiar home of mortality, there is, nevertheless, a companionship closer and nearer that dread hour than any love of ours can fathom; for, remember, Christ said: "Lo! I am with you always." Always! think, it enfolds here on earth, and *There* in Heaven. Always! only a brief word; but you will find it wide as a rainbow, if you let it over-arch your tears when next you weep, for verily it shines on tears till they become banded colors, like unto the Bow of Promise.

Since life, in teaching its lessons, is free from the formal bounding of man's reckoning of time, autumn—rather than spring, or the dawning of a new year—encompassed the first of the four experiences that meant so much to Nathan Parret.

Autumn!—yes; surely it is the season most rich in types of Nathan's long, patient endeavor to rescue Victor from evil; for at no other time of the year does Nature display contrasts between brightness and gloom in colors so sharply defined. And at no time did Nathan's hopes for Victor fall thick and fast like dead leaves, as during the autumn of which I now tell, for it holds the darkest page of the many dark pages in Victor Parret's life that were written over with sad falls from honor to dishonor. And yet, morning after morning, he promised to shun the very temptations that, at evening, he yielded to.

Truly, afterward, when Nathan recalled that time, he might well feel for him and his, there was a moral significance in the Americanism which calls the autumn the "*fall* of the year." Anyway, "the fall is a fit name for the season; it gives its main characteristics." And yet it is not marked only by fading and decay; for autumn is the time of harvest-home; during which ripened grain and fruit tell even the dullest listener to Nature's messages that

the labor and hope of seed-time has become a fulfilled promise. It was this Nathan strove to remember; and so, for long, he kept a glow of hope in his heart, just as the maple leaves kept their golden and scarlet brightness even on to late October. Then there came a night of keen frost, followed by a high wind, that, when morning came, had scattered the golden, red, and russet leaves in great heaps beneath the tree-boughs that, for days, they had robed in beauty and glory.

The night when the frost made this havoc was the one in which they brought Victor home, seemingly a lifeless, senseless burden. The innocent children slept spite the heavy tread of men's feet as they crossed the threshold, but Miss Amanda heard and understood.

Weeks, full of care and anxiety, followed that night. During them Nathan was gentle as a mother, and Hester tender as a wife, while slowly strength and intelligence came back to Victor. This was how that autumn became a marked time for Nathan Parret.

It was mid-winter before Victor regained anything like health; then there was a brief time of apparent return to vigor, and when Nathan was summoned to the bedside of a patient who lived far off over the hills, he did not hesitate in leaving

Victor to Hester's unaided care for the twenty-four hours he expected to be absent. It was clear in the early morning when he started; but before noon-time clouds overcast the blue sky, and snow-flakes began to fall in such quick succession that by five o'clock of the afternoon, when the short winter's day darkened, a heavy white mantle stretched over the hills and valleys for miles around Parret House.

Hester shivered as she drew the curtains, and wondered if Nathan had reached his destination; and then, remembering that perchance he had been met on the way by a message, saying his coming was "too late," and thus might return that very night, she drew back the crimson folds that she had let fall from before one of the front windows, that a gleam of light might shine out across the white roadway like a welcome home if he should return.

As she left the window, her eyes rested for a minute on the face of her husband, beautiful to her still, spite the marring touch of his misspent years. He was sitting in his father's arm-chair, which was pushed before the glowing fire burning on the wide hearth. His head was resting against the background of a crimson cushion, and his eyes were closed. Hester thought him sleeping as she paused by his side and bent and kissed his forehead be-

fore she left the room. She expected to return immediately, but she was detained for a full hour; first by Miss Amanda, who lived in the Chateau wing of the house now, that being Nathan's home, and then by the little people of the nursery. For though Adolph and the sisters Ruey and Sue were no longer children, other little ones had come to make music in the old mansion—a tiny girl, sweet and winsome as Ruey, and a baby boy, called Wollcott, in honor of the old Squire, whom Hester prayed he might resemble in character as well as name.

After these two delays it was quite dark when she re-entered the north parlor, save for the flickering, grotesque shadows the fire-light sent hovering up to the ceiling and playing around the old portraits and massive furniture, as it burnt low, and then shot up again in a fitful flame. Hester paid little heed to the dancing shadows, as she hastened to strike a match and light the lamp standing ready on the centre-table,—and then, a second later, she suddenly saw she was alone in the room—Victor had gone—and all in a moment she knew what that meant.

Women, disciplined as Hester had been for years, learn a wonderful self-control; by nature, too, she was not timid, for she was one in whom the spirit-

ual predominated over the physical, and silently she made ready to go forth in search of her wandering husband. Even Miss Amanda's quick ear did not catch the faint echo of her soft footfall as she crossed the wide hall and silently opened and closed the front door; neither did the sisters Ruey and Sue, who were busy with their lessons in Miss Amanda's room. As for Adolph, he was away from home at boarding-school, while the men and maid-servants were in the back part of the house; thus it happened that she, like Victor, passed unnoticed out from the warmth and shelter of home, into the cold of the mid-winter night. When Hester reached the road, she stood still for a minute, surrounded by the pure white snow that was so true an emblem of her own sweet, pure soul. It was a dreary scene on which she looked; the trees lifted their leafless branches up toward the sky as though in mute appeal for some help which did not come; and the sky, so tender and compassionate in summer and spring nights, looked cold and fathomless as she gazed up into the deep blue, from before which the clouds had rolled away. Even the stars, that to Hester had always seemed like loving angels, looking down in pity for the woes of the sorrowing children of earth, seemed now to be no longer sympathetic.

All this was Hester's fancy; for, in reality, Nature's encompassing of that winter's night gave sign of no unusual occurrence, either in "the heavens above, or the earth beneath." No; it was nothing more than a land and sky-scape, the like of which might be seen many a night again before either the snow melted or the leafless tree-boughs budded. It was merely a picture of still-life, except for the figure of a solitary man, wending his way through the newly-fallen snow, and hence making a path for himself, unaided by snow-plough or shovel, which suggested a certain amount of purpose. But, alas! there are paths and paths!

It was but slow progress the man made; for often he stopped, as though undecided as to the way he should go, turning and looking first toward one, and then toward the other of the two gleams of light that shone across the stainless snow—one tempting him to the village tavern, the other calling him to return to Parret House; one falling like an ugly blot of red, lurid light on an otherwise white page, the other flooding the dooryard and roadway before his home with a radiance soft and mellow.

As Victor—for that solitary, wandering man was none other than Victor Parret—turned from the one to the other of these lights, almost it seemed

to his watching wife as though she could feel the swaying of his purpose—from right to wrong, peace to misery; and he was, spiritually, like a pendulum, swinging between two hours on the dial-plate—one marking the knell of doom, the other ringing out loud and clear the sweet note of victory won over evil.

There was nothing striking or unusual in the scene, as I said. It was only a country road, with two lights from opposite points shining across the unbroken level of the snow; and yet—the fate of a soul hung on the decision made then and there!—Two lights! Ah! which would he seek? There was agony in Hester's cry that hour, as, kneeling on the cold snow, she clasped her hands in prayer, and pleaded for her husband's soul.—And think, hundreds of women know just such hours; and, woman-like, they hide them by smiles!

Afterward, all Victor Parret could tell of that time was that, as he stood halting between those beckoning lights, his whole being trembled with a conflict of emotions, before which he bowed like a reed bent by the wind. Hester, his children, Nathan, and home, seemed calling from one side, while from the other sounded the Voice that only the tempted can understand; and then—suddenly, as some captive bound by rivet and chain,—he turned and fled

from the tempting, lurid light with a force that, in a moment, broke chain and rivet. And Victor Parret was free! Ten years and more a prisoner, bound with the chain of temptation yielded to, and now—all in a moment—free!

No wonder he could not tell the details of that sharp struggle with, and that blessed victory over, temptation. But God knew their meaning; God knew how he had overcome, for God had heard and answered a woman's prayer that hour.

After that first step toward right, a great sense of protection and safety came over Victor; and like a child, he put his hand into Hester's, while gently she led him across the home threshold, back into warmth and shelter; and the earthly home to which she guided was only an emblem of the Heavenly Home, where we will never know what it means to be tempted. This wandering and return of Victor's, on that bleak night, encompassed the experience which stamped that winter-time for Nathan Parret as a season never to be forgotten, even when it glided into spring.—Yes, spring—for, so mindful is the Lord of His children, after winter spring comes. Spring, when all nature is glad as a smile; when, in very truth, it is a smile of God's mercy, proclaimed by the reviving life of earth's growing

things,—proclaimed, too, to the dwellers of Parret House by the mercy that wakened a new life in the soul of a man who had for years been little better than a dry, dead thing. For while, after that winter's night, Victor did not fall again into outward sin, he did not come into the Light of God's Love till the spring-time. But then he felt Nature's tender parable of renewed life, and he heeded the lesson; and thus, before the spring gave way to summer, in the old house we have learned to know so well, there came a day when Hester, Miss Amanda, and Nathan, softly whispered, the one to the other: "Rejoice with me, for the one who was dead is alive again; he was lost, and he is found." But, it was not of joy Victor spoke, but of "the mighty famine" when he began to be in want; and when he came to himself, and said, "Father, I have sinned"; and "when, while he was still a great way off, his Father saw him, and had compassion."

It was just the old story over again, of a man lost through sin, and *sought through Love*, and found through repentance. For, spite the Love and the seeking, there is no return to the Father's home without repentance. The sinner of to-day, like the prodigal of old, must learn every word of that prodigal's confession. And even then repentance does not change his poverty, or his misery; all that lifts

him out and above them is God's gift, through Christ.—Think of that gift; it welcomes the wanderer, without reproach,—the Father did not even say, "My prodigal son!" No; He said, "My son!" And then came restoration to the rank of a son: "Bring forth the best robe, and put it on him; and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet." The robe, even the garment of righteousness; the ring, a signet, with which the restored one might stamp his petitions, and seek large bounty from his Father's treasury; and shoes for his feet, "shod with the preparation of the Gospel of Peace." So pitiful was the Heavenly Father to poor, weak Victor, He did not leave him on earth to be tested by any long trial. No; He knew the weakness of the repentant child come home to Him, and after the summer had come and gone, the mortal life passed on to the immortal—for "with God, not the *quantity*, but the *quality* of faith is the thing of chief importance." And Victor's faith was simple as a child's, and that was all God asked of him.

A strange contrast this, to the long trial and repeated tests by which the Heavenly Father strengthened and prepared Nathan Parret's soul for His service, enabling him to gain the mastery over his own will, that led him to yield self-will to God's will. Only a strong will knows what that

means. But the Lord appoints the training each of His followers needs; and some of us are such poor, weak children, we are only fit to work in His vineyard for the eleventh hour, while strong souls, like Nathan's, can mount up as on wings, and for them there is service from sunrise to sundown.

You hardly need to be told, for Nathan the experience of the spring was the joy of his brother's repentance—a joy that sealed it a time never to be forgotten; for repentance, and the return of prodigals, is a joy that lasts through eternity, and fills with music the songs of the redeemed.

And now our way leads on to summer.—Summer; the word suggests sweet content and calm—and the suggestion holds true of the hour of which I tell, for its atmosphere was peace. The moon was at its full, just rising over the tree-tops, touching them with silvery glory, like a benediction, while its beams illumined earth and sky with a shimmer of soft radiance, in which the stars shone like lesser lights before the greater luminary. And thus they became emblems of the emotions stirring Nathan Parret's heart; for his dream of early love, which had never known the awaking of realization, grew pale and shadowy that even-tide, before the fuller, deeper power of later affection.

It was a tender evening; there was scarcely a breath of air astir—only the moonbeams seemed freighted with messages that wakened dim memories of the past that stirred the soul, while at the same time they thrilled it with hopes of the present. It was an hour, too, that stood apart from all others, lustrous and bright, though with a subdued radiance that had something holy and quiet in it, like the glimmer with which a pearl shines among sparkling gems.

Nathan Parret and Nan Benson felt its subtle power; and, though they had met almost every day of the ten years since Nathan's return home, never, except during the first interview, had their hearts come so close in conscious sympathy, as they did that evening when together they walked the familiar high-road. Nevertheless, they were silent till they came to the turn where the two paths met—the one leading across the level stretch of sandy plain; the other toward the wood-road, by the side of the singing brooklet. It was Nathan who at last broke the silence, and the words he uttered were naught more than the simple question: "Which path shall we take?" But as he thus asked, a tide of feeling, strong and masterful as a sea-wave, swayed him, and without waiting for Nan to reply, he led the way toward the path where the wild-

flowers grew, and where tree-boughs met in loving intimacy of branch and twig—strong forest trees, around which woodbine and ivy climbed for support.

Have you ever noted how joy, like pain, is brief in its sway of the most intense emotions? Hence it is, that the story which changes life from prose to poetry takes but a minute in its telling. At least it was thus in Nathan's and Nan's experience, for the moon was still in the east, the glow of sunlight still in the west, when Nathan had said his say, and Nan had whispered—Yes.

An hour later the white-haired judge, Nan's father, and Miss Amanda, had heard the news. And then Nathan and Nan knelt side by side, hand in hand, while in a voice feeble and low, a man still in the early years of middle age, but with strength broken and gone, had whispered a prayer of blessing on their bowed heads. That prayer was the first audible petition Victor Parret had offered. Do you wonder, with the blessings for which Victor pleaded, thanksgivings were blended for Nathan's love, which had turned aside from worldly honor and success, self-pleasing and self-seeking, to give ten years of his strong, brave life to the service of striving to help rescue from the power of evil "his own brother," that he might "bring him to Jesus." Truly, Victor had cause for thanksgiving!

Nathan and Nan were still kneeling—though Victor's prayer had ended, when, like some note of sweetest music, the hush in the room was broken by Hester's voice, as softly she murmured: "Nathan, my brother, Offero, 'the bearer,' crowned now Saint Christopher."

Next day Patty Gaylord went winging her way from one house to another in the village and township of N—. And everywhere she went she told the glad tidings, that Nathan Parret and Nan Benson, those two, so well worthy of one another, had at last discovered, that only as their hearts were attuned, the one to the other, in the happiness of married love, could their lives yield the full harmony of service that belongs to souls, "set each to each, like perfect music unto noblest words."

Had bright-eyed Patty any happy secret of her own to tell? For a reply to that question you must seek Judge Benson's oldest grandson. I think, —yes, I feel sure, he will answer in the very words his Aunt Nan used when she told Miss Amanda of her gladness: "It is summer over all the land,— and summer in all our hearts."

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